

Pixerécourt and the French
Romantic Drama

BY

ALEXANDER LACEY, M.A. PH.D.

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PREFACE

The purpose of this work is to establish the relationship between the Romantic drama in France of the period 1829-1843 (circa) and the melodrama or "popular tragedy" which flourished in the second-class theatres during the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Since the essence of the melodrama of that period is found in the works of Guilbert de Pixérécourt (a fact which no student of French literature will deny) it has been thought sufficient to concentrate attention on these works and their connection with the Romantic drama, rather than to treat all or a large number of the many authors of melodrama who helped to flood the popular stage at that time.

Almost every scholar who has made a study of either the melodrama or the Romantic drama of the early nineteenth century in France has noted the similarities that exist between the two forms or has declared that the latter was influenced to some extent by the former.¹ But up to the present moment no work has appeared whose definite purpose is to treat exclusively the question of this long-recognized relationship. Nowhere have the two forms of drama been studied closely side by side, as it were under the same microscope. In the course of this work an attempt is made to treat this relationship not so much historically as analytically, by separating the two forms of drama into their respective component parts and then comparing corresponding parts in order to discover, if possible, the kinship existing between them. The method adopted has been to analyse a number of the best-known, most popular, most representative works of Pixérécourt (as the typical melodramatist of the time), so as to discover, first of all, the fundamental characteristics of the melodrama of which they are representative. Then, the same methods of analysis having been

¹Cf. Maurice Albert: *Les Théâtres des boulevards*, chap. XII. C.M. des Granges: *Geoffroy et la critique dramatique sous le Consulat et l'Empire*, Livre II, chap. II. W. G. Hartog: *Guilbert de Pixérécourt*, chap. VIII(b). F. J. Mason: *The Melodrama in France*, chap. VI. A. Nebout: *Le Drame Romantique*, pp. 275-297. H. Parigot: *Le Drame d'Alexandre Dumas*, chap. IV. P. et V. Glachant: *Essai critique sur le théâtre de Victor Hugo*, vol. 2 (introduction).

applied to the Romantic drama of Hugo, Dumas père and Vigny, the attempt is made to find out where and why there is marked resemblance or difference. In the historical portion of the work (Chapter II) the actual external contact of the two forms is also treated, so that both external and internal evidence is offered in order to prove the existence of a very definite relationship.

When we use the word "melodrama" in the course of this work we refer (unless it is otherwise understood and noted) to the type of play which flourished during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century on the second-class (or "boulevard") theatres of Paris, and of which Pixierécourt was the most prolific author, a type of play characterized by exciting incidents and emotional thrills, accompanied by music calculated to emphasize the varying situations and to suggest the nature of the characters portrayed. "Romantic drama" in this case means the dramas of Victor Hugo that were written during the period 1827-1843, the dramas of Alexandre Dumas père (those produced between 1829 and 1836 being considered sufficient for the present purpose), and the original dramas of Alfred de Vigny.

The author wishes to express his sincere thanks to Professor H. E. Ford, of Victoria College, Toronto, for the loan of important works dealing with the subject, as well as for advice willingly and readily rendered; also, to Professor J. S. Will, of University College, Toronto, for the use of books from his private library, and for the many helpful suggestions which his broad knowledge of French literature and his keen critical faculty have enabled him to offer.

Toronto, Ont.

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CHAPTER I

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MELODRAMA OF PIXERÉCOURT

(I) *Dramatic Qualities*

Brunetière enunciates what he calls "the law of the drama" as follows: "Drama is a representation of the will of man in conflict with the mysterious powers or natural forces which limit and belittle us; it is one of us thrown living upon the stage, there to struggle against fatality; against social law; against one of his fellows; against himself, if need be; against the ambitions, the interests, the prejudices, the folly, the malevolence of those around him."¹ That is to say, the essence of drama, according to this definition at least, is struggle—of one will or of several wills—hence conflict, hence also uncertainty, suspense, anxiety.

But, says H. A. Jones,² in a play constructed on these principles, character would be sacrificed to plot. Further, the play would miss its chief end, that of giving an impression of life. "If the drama is really a struggle of will-power, this struggle should often be kept beneath the surface of the action. Though hidden, it will yet be the dominant moving power of the play." That is, the struggle should not be merely physical, or external, but chiefly mental. Drama is a matter of mind rather than of spectacle.

Professor G. P. Baker³ differs from Brunetière by defining "dramatic" as "creative of emotional response." The word "dramatic," he asserts, may be used of mere physical action, of action which illustrates character or helps to an understanding of the play, of mental activity, or even of a situation lacking in activity, provided the audience can be roused to emotional response. "While action is held to be essential in drama, emotion is really the essen-

¹F. Brunetière: *The Law of the Drama* (published by the dramatic museum of Columbia University, New York, 1914).

²In his introduction to the above-mentioned work.

³In *Dramatic Technique*, chap. II.

tial.”¹ “Conflict covers a large part of drama, but not the whole of it.”² He takes the case of a person sitting motionless, blank in mind. “If the dramatist can make the audience feel the tragedy of the contrast between what might have been and what is for this figure, he rouses emotion in his hearers, and in so doing makes his material dramatic.” But surely the situation thus described is pathetic rather than dramatic. It is true, of course, that emotion may be aroused in such a case, the emotion of sympathy or pity, but there is no tenseness of feeling, no anxiety, no uncertainty or suspense. A play that consisted entirely of such an evocation of sympathy could hardly with justice be called a “dramatic” success. The mere arousing of emotion does not appear to be sufficient of itself to make a situation dramatic. There must be a certain amount of excitement as well as emotion, there must be uncertainty, anxiety, suspense, and it is difficult to see how these can exist without a conflict or struggle of some sort. If the arousing of emotion were sufficient of itself to create drama, then a lyric poet like (say) Lamartine would be as good a dramatist as Corneille.

The mere revelation of a condition of mind can hardly be dramatic unless that condition of mind denotes an inner conflict. Hamlet’s famous soliloquy (“To be or not to be”) is indeed a dramatic speech, but only because of the mental conflict it expresses.

But “emotional response” is a necessary, indeed an essential, element of drama, for without such a response the play falls flat, the audience can only be slightly interested in it, as a man may be interested in the solution of a puzzle. It is clear that the two elements—conflict and emotional response—must go together to produce drama. One is tempted to refashion the definition given by Professor Baker, and define drama as the representation, by means of character and dialogue, of a conflict (internal chiefly, but including the external) which produces emotional response in the spectator. But almost any kind of conflict will produce emotional response, for the audience is bound to take sides, bound to make the issue of the conflict affect itself personally. Even a game of cards or a football match shows this, and the reason why so many people take delight in such things is just because of the dramatic value there is in them. If we could have a conflict without any

¹*Ibid.*, p. 42.

²*Ibid.*, p. 44.

affecting results, one in which the spectators were absolutely impartial and careless as to the outcome, we should have a conflict that is undramatic. But it is difficult indeed to imagine such a conflict. Hence it would appear that it is conflict, after all, that is the chief essential in drama.

Where there is mental conflict there will often, but not always, be physical conflict, so that the latter is usually, though not by any means essentially, an element of drama. Physical conflict is, moreover, a means always ready to the hand of the dramatist, and especially the second-rate dramatist, by which he can create a sort of emotional response, particularly in the minds of the less cultured of the spectators. The type of spectator who listened with delight to the tragedies of Corneille and Racine in the reign of Louis XIV was satisfied with the mental conflicts offered to him in these plays, while the uncultured audiences that crowded the theatres of the "Boulevard du Crime" in Revolutionary times demanded physical conflict in generous doses.

Physical conflict, though quite legitimate and proper on the stage as long as it does not usurp the place of the inner struggle, and as long as it follows as a necessary result of the inner struggle, may, however, easily degenerate into mere violence, which is sensational and not dramatic. This is what occurs in the melodrama of Pixérécourt. In *Cælia*, for example, there is physical conflict of a very violent and exciting nature, entirely overshadowing the element of inner struggle contained in the play. Certain scenes consist entirely of what one might call "tableaux mouvants", in which no word is spoken, the attention of the audience being fastened upon the actions of the characters, who are engaged in bitter fighting one against another.¹ Many similar scenes could be cited from other plays of Pixérécourt. In the majority of cases such scenes could be omitted without the least detriment to the plot.²

Another device constantly used in the melodrama of Pixérécourt for the purpose of achieving dramatic effect is suspense. There are frequent periods of calm during which preparation is made for the next conflict. The calm, however, is made just as exciting for the spectator as the conflict itself. While it must be admitted that suspense is indeed dramatic in its nature, for it may be produced

¹E.g. Act III, sc. 10.

²E.g. *Le Chien de Montargis*, I, 14-18.

by (1) conflict impending, (2) conflict involved but not directly presented, (3) conflict still proceeding, yet the dramatic value of suspense is lessened if the final outcome is known by the spectator beforehand, or even strongly suspected. In such cases suspense becomes a mere waiting for the expected event to happen.¹ Such is generally the case in melodrama. The audience well knows that the villain is bound to fail, struggle as he may, and that the hero is bound to win in the end, no matter what the odds against him. To sum up what we have already said in this regard, it is not in melodrama that one finds true dramatic effect, but one does find a weak imitation or reflection of it. Sensational thrills, produced by alternating periods of suspense and violent physical conflict, take the place of the true "emotional response" which accompanies a dramatic conflict.

Another feature characteristic of the works of Pixérécourt (as of all melodrama) is complexity of intrigue, the weaving together of many incidents in order to produce a plot full of surprises and unexpected turns. It is comparatively easy for a Pixérécourt to create thrills in his audience, since he has at his disposal all sorts of artificial devices and never scruples to employ them, whereas the author of the highest forms of drama relies only upon nature and reason. In the one case the chief requirement is sufficient ingenuity to combine and connect fortuitous incidents, in the other case there must be profound insight into human nature and unswerving fidelity to truth and reason.

The plot of Pixérécourt's *L'Homme à trois Visages* is an example of a very complex intrigue, cleverly and palpably arranged by the ingenuity of the author, entangled and disentangled by means that are quite artificial and extraordinary. Disguises, ruses, letters, pretences, discoveries, rumours, refutations of rumours, arrests, escapes—such are the means used to create an atmosphere of suspense and excitement, a series of thrills. The outcome of the play does not in the least depend on character, or on the logic of circumstances, but merely on accident, on the clever and frequent use of external means.

The following, therefore, are the chief characteristics of the melodrama of Pixérécourt in respect of dramatic values: (1) a

¹The fact that in the Greek plays the outcome was known to the spectators beforehand does not disprove this. Such foreknowledge tends on the whole to destroy the effect of illusion which is the very life and soul of drama.

sharp conflict of wills (the good *vs.* the bad) leading inevitably to an outward show of violence; (2) physical action for its own sake; (3) complexity of intrigue; (4) suspense and excitement produced by arbitrary means.

(II) *The Tragic Element*

One can hardly understand what is meant by the term "tragic" without some reference to the Greek use of the word. The following definition, based on Greek usage, is given by Gustave Lanson in his *Esquisse de la Tragédie Française*:¹ "Le tragique est la manifestation, dans un cas douloureux, des limites de la condition humaine et de la force invisible qui l'étreint." To the Greeks, says M. Lanson, "le tragique était le spectacle et l'émotion (crainte ou pitié) de la misère humaine; mais de la misère créée par les conditions essentielles de la vie, par la mystérieuse violence de la destinée, par le jeu souvent ironique d'une force, incompréhensible, divine, qui confond l'homme et l'écrase." The sight of humanity rendered unhappy by circumstances and forces over which it has no control is tragic (according to the Greeks, at least). The inevitability of the calamity is one essential feature of tragedy.²

A second essential feature is made clear when we consider the nature of the emotions involved (the "terror" and "pity" of the ancients). Here the ideas of "dramatic" and "tragic" approach each other rather closely. We have seen that a dramatic situation is one that by means of a conflict is capable of producing emotional response. Now if the emotions aroused are profound and noble, if they appeal to the deeper mind or spirit, then the situation is not only dramatic but also tragic, or at least has tragic possibilities. It is, however, at the final moment of the dénouement logically brought about, when the inevitable calamity has occurred, that these emotions are most deeply stirred, hence that is also the moment of greatest tragic value.

With the statement of Aristotle that the emotions concerned in tragedy are those of pity and terror, however, modern thinkers are inclined to disagree. It is doubtful, indeed, that terror really

¹Chap. I, sec. IV.

²In modern tragedy this inevitability arises more often from conditions inherent in character itself than it does from forces outside character. Compare Hamlet with (say) Edipus.

enters into the hearts of spectators at the sight of simulated death on the stage; as for pity, while it is generally present, yet it is not among the noblest feelings inspired by true tragedy. Most great tragedies, as Professor Allardyce Nicoll points out,¹ have something hard and stern in their make-up. The sense of awe, of almost reverent wonder, as if one stood in the presence of some heroically grand spectacle, the sense of the sublimity of human character in the face of tremendous odds, the feeling of nearness to that which is universal and eternal—these are some of the emotions aroused by tragedy at its highest and best. It is this that enables the spectator to endure with comparative calm the sight of wounds and death. The sense of nobility in human character transcends the feeling of horror. The lesson that character is above the mere issue of life or death is thoroughly inculcated in tragedy.

With regard to the first essential feature of tragedy—inevitability—the Greeks, with their strong sense of the power of destiny in controlling the lives and fortunes of men, placed more importance upon the accidental and seemingly providential (or fatal) circumstances than is acceptable to the modern mind. When, for example, the murderer of Mityls is killed by the fall of the statue of his victim, there is to the Greek a clear case of providential retribution, which could not have been avoided. By the educated modern mind, however, the fall of the statue would be regarded as an accident and nothing more. The tragic value of this particular death is, therefore, much less to the modern mind than it was to the Greek. In the acceptance of the “irony of fate” as a tragic force the Greek and the modern conceptions of tragedy differ.

Another circumstance which was often made use of by the Greeks as a tragic means, but which also has less value to moderns, is that of “mistaken identity”. The tragedy *Edipus* is a well-known example of a play based on such a circumstance. Such plays are to be found, indeed, plentifully enough in more modern drama, for example, in the works of Voltaire.

Both Fate and mistaken identity are made use of extensively by Pixérécourt. A good example of the irony of fate may be taken from *Céline*. The criminal Truguelin is continually being brought face to face with the fact of his crime, committed eight years before the play is supposed to begin. It is made to appear throughout the whole play that Destiny (or, to use a modern term, Providence) is

¹A. Nicoll: *An Introduction to Dramatic Theory*, p. 73 ff.

here playing the part of avenger, making use of the very victims of the crime for the purpose of ruining the criminal. There is the same irony of fate in *L'Homme à trois Visages*, where Providence, in the person of Vivaldi, works to bring about the downfall of the traitor Orsano. The same use of the irony of fate is seen in *La Femme à deux Maris*, in *La Citerne*, in almost any of the plays of Pixérécourt.

But while in Greek tragedy the use of Fate as a tragic force did not destroy the artistic value of the play, in the melodrama it is otherwise, for in the latter case the author is continually forced to warp his plot for the sake of obtaining a conclusion which is preconceived and stereotyped. To experience tragic effect at its highest we must realize, or at least believe, that the calamity has developed logically from the original data of the play. "What appears to us as an accident, even an overwhelming one, is not appropriate for great effects on the stage."¹ Hence the lack of a strictly logical development of plot in melodrama robs it of any tragic value it might have possessed.

Again, Aristotle rightly says that "tragedy should deal with the mean between the extremes of character, with a person who is neither a paragon of virtue nor morally depraved, but who falls into misfortune owing to a mistake." A modern philosopher, Hegel, similarly maintains that "tragedy depends primarily on the collision of spiritual forces in individuals whose action has an aspect both of rightness and of wrongness. These forces, especially in ancient tragedy, cannot be detached from the individual's personality, and involve, in the issue by which the conflict restores unity to the spiritual world, the destruction of the persons who represent them. This identification of the entire personalities with their substantial aims or rights is the secret of the unhappy ending. If the connection between character and issues is lost, and the story becomes one of pure innocence oppressed by the chances of a hostile world, then the tragic element is destroyed, and the effect is no longer tragic, but an idle or futile melancholy or horror."²

This lack of connection between character and issues is the weak point in the construction of melodrama, and is clearly exemplified in the works of Pixérécourt. There is no attempt to identify personality with any "substantial aims or rights", no "collision

¹Freytag: *Technique of the Drama*, I, 7.

²Quoted in Bosanquet's *History of Aesthetics*, ch. XII, sec. II, sub-sec. 3.

of spiritual forces in individuals", no co-existence of rightness and wrongness in the actions or the character of either hero or villain.

Horror, not tragedy, is universally present in the melodrama of Pixierécourt. There may or may not be an unhappy ending,¹ but there is bound to be plenty of the horrible. Usually the horror lies merely in the sensation of extreme danger, which passes away as quickly as it arose. There is an approach to tragedy, but not its complete attainment. The emotions of pity and terror are indeed aroused, but only to be at once alleviated. Often, however, the element of horror is heightened by the violent death of the villain, or by the sudden overwhelming of all those fighting on the side of wrong.

This inordinate cult of the horrible explains why melodrama has so often been defined as "popular tragedy". It seeks to arouse, in a clumsy and illogical way, and by the easiest means possible, the same emotions as are aroused in true tragedy. But to counter-balance this intention there is also the desire for a "satisfactory" ending, so that the audience may leave the theatre with a sense of justice done, a stronger belief in the universal triumph of good. The horrible in melodrama is usually of momentary duration only, an excitement of the nerves which soon passes away. Even in such plays as *Valentine* and *La Tête de Mort*, both of which end unhappily, the lack of logical consequence, the insistence on a moral purpose, the failure to identify character and issues, the exaggerated use of external and arbitrary means, all tend to lessen whatever tragic value might exist.

Further, the nobler emotions aroused by true tragedy are lacking in the plays of Pixierécourt. There is nothing of that sense of awe in the presence of something heroic and grand, of something in human nature that conquers death, which we are conscious of in real tragedy. The hero or heroine represents nothing universal or profound in human nature. We are not, even in the case of *Valentine*, stirred to wonder at the nobility of her character or the fundamental inevitability of her final act, we are simply moved (if at all) to pity the plight of one so unfortunate. It is by means of such evocations of pathos that Pixierécourt seeks to create a sort of emotional response replacing the more profound and lasting emotions of tragedy.

¹Certain plays of Pixierécourt do end unhappily: *Valentine*, *L'Evasion de Marie Stuart*, *La Tête de Mort*, *Alice ou les Fossoyeurs Ecossais*.

(III) *Pathos and Sentiment*

Just as it is necessary to distinguish carefully between the idea of the dramatic and that of the tragic, so must we separate the tragic from the pathetic. The tragic is always more or less pathetic but the pathetic is not always tragic. An event or a situation is pathetic if it inspires pity, but, as Hegel says, "pity for mere misfortune, like fear of it, is not *tragic* pity or fear." The latter "appeals not only to our sensibilities and instinct of self-preservation, but also to our deeper mind or spirit". Tragedy begets pity, but there must accompany that feeling the realization of the inevitableness of the calamity, as well as the sense of awe in the presence of noble human character. The spectacle of suffering in itself is pathetic, without reference to the how or why of the suffering. But such pathos is not *tragic* pathos since it does not appeal to the "deeper mind or spirit". To feel pity is in the power of everyone human, but to experience tragic pathos one must be able to trace the lines of action, to determine issues, to calculate the effect of circumstances upon character, to decide as to what is or is not inevitable. It is true that the spectator must do this "après coup", and not beforehand like the dramatist, yet one must be something of a dramatist oneself in order to enter fully into the spirit and emotion of a really tragic situation.

Pity itself, though not tragic pity, is easy to inspire. It is also easily felt, especially by the unsophisticated, in whom the power of the emotions is greater than that of the reason. Hence a type of drama that is confessedly popular (such as melodrama) will be sure to harp rather loudly on the pathetic string. The author of melodrama is a failure if he cannot move his audience, or a large part of it, to tears—"Vive le mélodrame, où Margot a pleuré!" Yet there is absolutely no "appeal to the deeper mind or spirit".

The pathetic element plays an important part indeed in the melodrama of Pixérécourt. It accounts for his constant use of certain stock characters, such as the oppressed orphan, the persecuted heroine, the helpless old man. It accounts also for the continual harping on family affections, the filial duties, the respect due to the aged and the infirm. Yet this sort of pathetic effect, too frequently sought and too easily obtained, is far removed from that nobler pathos aroused in the spectator by the contemplation of an awful, but inevitable, tragic dénouement.

Examples of Pixierécourt's use of the pathetic as a means of obtaining a cheap emotional effect are not difficult to find. In *Victor ou l'Enfant de la Forêt* there is the pathetic situation of the lovers, who are in danger of separation from no fault of their own;¹ there is the pleading of Victor with his father that the latter might turn away from a bandit's life and thus make happiness possible for all concerned;² there is finally the death of the bandit-father, his confession of a wasted life, his belated exhibition of parental affection—all calculated to bring tears into the eyes of the unsophisticated spectators. In *L'Homme à trois Visages* we have the oft-repeated pleadings of Rosemonde on behalf of her lover Vivaldi. In *La Femme à deux Maris* there is the spectacle of a pure, innocent woman persecuted by a worthless husband whom she has long thought dead. In the same play we have the sight of an injured daughter begging for a restored place in the affection of her afflicted father, who scorns her because he thinks her unworthy of his love. Again and again in Pixierécourt we have a pathetic situation arising from the separation of members of the same family. The grief of a mother whose children are torn from her to be offered as hostages to a cruel enemy is the subject of *Les Maures d'Espagne*. The condemnation of an innocent man for a crime committed by someone else is the central event in the plot of *Le Chien de Montargis*. One might easily multiply examples of this kind, but sufficient have been given to show that this type of play relies for its main effects on its power of arousing the sentiment of pathos in the hearts of simple-minded spectators.

In pure tragedy, pathos is necessarily found in connection with the tragic outcome; in melodrama, on the other hand, pathos often occurs episodically, out of the direct line of the action. That is to say, whereas in tragedy pathos exists because it is inevitably associated with the final calamity, in melodrama pathos appears to be its own justification. Again, the greater the moral or mental strength of the victim, the stronger his will and his resistance against his fate, the less likely is he to give vent to pathetic complaint. It is the weak who complain, who call for pity, and in melodrama it is always the weak with whom we are asked to sympathize—the orphaned, the aged, the decrepit, the defenceless—never the strong man, the hero in his hour of disaster.

¹Act II, sc. 7.

²III, 7.

The pathos of melodrama is therefore not tragic, but merely sentimental.

This brings us to the necessity of distinguishing between the "pathetic" and the "sentimental". The latter term is much broader in meaning, and often includes the former, as we have just seen. When we apply the term "sentimental" to a work of art, we mean to express that such a work of art portrays in a touching manner the softer feelings of the heart, ranging from simple humanity, gratitude, fidelity, to love in its various forms. Pity is naturally included among these emotions. The "sentimental" in art is always more or less self-conscious; the "pathetic", on the other hand, is often involuntary. When a writer causes his characters to descant upon their misfortunes, to complain of the hardness of their fate, to protest unduly their generosity, their gratitude, their affection, he is guilty of sentimentality. There is in the "sentimental" an element of exaggeration, a "dwelling-upon" the emotions. Sentimentality, therefore, naturally belongs to the realm of melodrama, which makes its appeal to audiences that delight in strong emotional stimuli. Most people prefer the mere tickling of the emotions to that more profound stirring in which feeling, intellect and will are all concerned. But this tickling of the emotions is beneath the dignity of true art. "Not the presentation of a passion for itself, but of a passion which leads to action is the business of dramatic art", says Freytag.¹

But the sentimentality which we find in the melodrama of Pixérécourt is not entirely due to the author's desire for a "popular" appeal. It is part of the legacy bequeathed by the eighteenth century. It is largely the continuation into the nineteenth century of the "sensibilité" that marks so much of the literary and dramatic work of the preceding age. In this way, indeed, the melodrama is the offspring of the "drame bourgeois". Pixérécourt continues Diderot, Sedaine and Mercier.

What M. Gaiffe says of "le drame" applies equally well to the melodrama of Pixérécourt: "Ce qu'on demande à un dramaturge, c'est d'abord un enseignement moral adapté aux besoins du jour et répondant aux aspirations du public bourgeois; ce sont aussi des situations pathétiques . . . la sensibilité du héros, exaspérée jusqu'au délire, s'exprime en paroles, non plus en actes; au lieu des nuances du sentiment ce sont des hymnes sonores en l'honneur

¹In *Technique of the Drama*, chap. I, part II.

de l'amour, de la bienfaisance, de l'humanité."¹ As Ginisty says:² "Le mélodrame est en germe dans les conceptions de Mercier" who had declared that "le pauvre a plus besoin qu'un autre de pleurer et de s'attendrir".

The "sensibilité" of the melodrama is visible in almost every scene and every speech. To it is due the artificiality of the style of language employed by Pixérécourt. The use of the "sentimental epithet" is a noted characteristic of that style: *père tendre*, *ami généreux*, *amant fidèle*, *époux sensible*, *faible* *vieillard*, *nouvelle affreuse*, etc. One is reminded of Alfred de Musset's sarcasm on the "abus des adjectifs" in one of the famous "*Lettres de Dupuis et Cotonet*".

The morality of the melodrama of Pixérécourt is also part and parcel of its sentimentalism. It is the morality of a Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a type of morality whose source is supposed to be found in the "inherent goodness of human nature". The good characters in Pixérécourt are always "sensible". The bad ones have no feeling at all.

To this exaggerated love of sentiment is also to be attributed the use of a very common melodramatic convention, viz., the voice of the blood. This absurdity, says M. Gaiffe, was not invented by the authors of melodrama, but is found in many works of reputed importance in the eighteenth century. It occurs occasionally, though not very frequently, in Pixérécourt. *Cœlina*, for example, is conscious of a strange feeling of affection for Francisque long before she knows that he is her father.³

It appears to be true, therefore, that the melodrama as constituted by Pixérécourt preserves and continues that "sensibilité" which is one of the chief features of "le drame bourgeois". From the beginning of the Revolution, indeed, the "drame bourgeois" itself was doomed. Driven almost entirely from the stage during the years following the fall of the Bastille, it lost most of its prestige and popularity. It still lingered on for a few years, however, in spite of the opposition of Napoleon, but it no longer held a place of importance on the stage. The melodrama, on the other hand, became more and more prominent and popular after 1800, and to a large extent took the place of "le drame". It also took on many

¹*Le Drame en France au dix-huitième siècle*, chap. II, sec. 2.

²*Le Mélodrame*, p. 11.

³*Cœlina*, Act I, sc. 3 and 4.

of the characteristics of "le drame". In fact, one may say that the Revolution forced "le drame bourgeois" to find refuge on the boulevards, there to surrender itself to a process of transfusion, as it were, by means of which it yielded up its life-blood to its more plebeian descendant, the melodrama.

We must not forget, however, that while sentiment plays a very great rôle in melodrama yet the predominant interest is that supplied by the intrigue. The plot is after all the most important thing in the play. Sentiment runs a very close second.

(IV) *The Sensational Element*

By "sensational" in this connection we mean not only that which appeals to the senses of the spectator, such as striking stage effects, tableaux, music (for all of which the melodrama is especially noted), but, in a broader sense, that which creates a state of excitement or sudden surprise in the mind of the spectator. The sensational is the strongest element in the melodrama of Pixierécourt.

We may distinguish in the sensational, as far as drama is concerned, two separate species: (1) that which, by means of stage devices, makes a strong appeal to the senses, chiefly those of sight and hearing; (2) that which, by means of unexpected developments in the plot, produces nervous excitement and surprise in the spectator. Appreciation of the latter type of the sensational requires some slight amount of intellectual effort, which is by no means necessary in the case of the former. The one is slightly dramatic, the other merely theatrical.

No dramatist of the age understood the value of scenic effect better than did Pixierécourt. None did so much as he to introduce and maintain it on the stage, and to this fact he owed much of his success; to this fact also the boulevard theatres (La Gaîté and L'Ambigu-Comique) owed their popularity. As Geoffroy remarked: "La curiosité des spectateurs est rarement ingrate". With regard to the stage effects in *Robinson Crusoë* (1805) the same critic says: "Les décorations ne sont pas la partie la moins curieuse de ce mélodrame, spécialement celle du troisième acte. . . . Si les auteurs font quelque frais de talent pour alimenter l'esprit, les entrepreneurs font de grandes dépenses d'argent pour repaître les yeux de l'assemblée."

The dénouement of *La Citerne* is another example of sensational

stage effect: "On entend une explosion terrible. Le mur du fond s'écroule, les rampes de l'escalier s'affaissent et se rompent. La galerie, n'étant plus soutenu, s'abîme avec un fracas horrible. . . . On voit dans le fond les cours du château éclairées par les torches, les flammes, et remplies de combattants. Par suite de cette même secousse, le devant de la citerne à droite s'ébranle, des blocs énormes se détachent et laissent voir un bois rempli d'alguzils et d'ouvriers qui travaillent à démolir ce repaire."

Other typical examples of the art of the decorator and stage mechanic that are found in Pixierécourt are: an eruption of Mt. Etna (in *Le Belvédère*), a flood (*Charles-le-Téméraire*), a river overflowing its banks (*La Fille de l'Exilé*). Lengthy and exact descriptions of the mechanical means used to obtain these effects are given with the text of some of these plays. Music and dancing, tableaux, the firing of guns, the clash of swords occur in almost every play. It is well-nigh impossible to exhaust the fertility of melodramatic invention in matters of mere spectacle.

The second kind of sensational effect is that which depends on sudden and unexpected developments in the plot, by means of which the audience is kept in a constant state of excitement, never knowing what is coming next. Unexpected appearances, chance meetings of long-separated relatives, narrow escapes from death, providential accidents, revelation of important secrets, clever ruses, disguises, mystifications—these are a few of the many methods adopted to keep the nerves of the spectators always on edge.

(V) *Minor Characteristics*

(a) THE STOCK CHARACTERS OF MELODRAMA

These are so well known that it is quite unnecessary to consider them at any great length here. One general feature characterizes each and all of them, viz., they exist not as life-like personages but as parts of a machine for carrying on the plot. No noticeable difference in character separates a Coëlina from an Eliza or a Floreska, there is only a difference in situation. The same is true of an Edwinski and a Vivaldi, of an Orsano and a Zamoski. Strictly speaking, there are no characters in melodrama, there are only types, easily recognized and constantly recurring, such as the villain, the hero, the "persecuted innocent" and the clown or "niais". There are also, besides these four principals, two other prevailing types,

the "accomplice" and the "faithful friend". But these two are to be considered as mere understudies of their respective principals, the villain and the hero.

The villain possesses nearly all the defects of character known to man, with courage as the only redeeming quality—though often he proves to be a coward at heart. His chief defect, however, is his lack of "sensibilité". He sometimes repents of his crimes, but only when his doom is near, and we doubt the sincerity of his repentance. He is often of high rank, since the greater his power and influence the greater his downfall.

The hero is in most respects the exact opposite of the villain. He is sympathetic, generous, humane, faithful, unselfish, brave, clever (like the villain, only more so), incapable of crime. He is the tool of Providence, and his functions are to protect the innocent, rescue the victim, defeat the wicked schemes of the villain. At times he himself is the persecuted one, as in *L'Homme à trois Visages*. Occasionally the part of hero is taken by a woman, as in *L'Ange Tutélaire*.

The "innocent persécuté" is usually a woman. Like the hero, she is "sensible" and possesses all the good qualities. She can sometimes defend herself (as in *Tékéli*), is often bold enough to defy the villain, is ready to suffer rather than yield to his power, but feminine weakness often gets the better of her, and she faints at the sight of blood.

The clown or "niais" provides comic relief in tense situations. He is usually on the side of the hero, though occasionally he assists the villain (*Tékéli*, *L'Homme à trois Visages*). In that case he is a coward (Bras-de-Fer, Calcagno). He generally speaks in dialect, uses slang and strange oaths. He is not necessarily stupid, but sometimes by his cleverness saves the hero from danger or death.¹ The clown was a necessary part of melodrama as far as the audience was concerned. Those plays which had no comic character (such as *Les Maures d'Espagne*) were much less popular and had far shorter runs than the plays which did have such a character.

(b) THE CONVENTIONS OF MELODRAMA

Melodrama, like all other forms of drama, has its conventions, its aids to plot-motivation and development. Some of these have already been referred to. They are easily recognized and are

¹E.g. Bataille in *La Femme à deux Maris*, Peters in *Les Mines de Pologne*.

repeated again and again with a naïve disregard for "vraisemblance". Such ordinary stage conventions as the monologue, the stage-whisper, the aside, are, of course, common. Then we have the use of documents and letters for the revealing of important secrets, eavesdroppings, presentments, the voice of the blood, secret passages, grottoes, closets serving as hiding-places at need. Such things as these occur and re-occur, showing a lamentable lack of invention and a slavish servility of imitation on the part of the author.

(c) LOCAL COLOUR

Pixerécourt often tried to give an illusion of reality to his plays by generous use of "local colour". Thus, in a play of which the setting is in Venice, we have canals, gondolas, grottoes, Venetian palaces and costumes;¹ if savages appear on the stage, we learn what their music, dancing, costumes, dwellings are like;² we even hear samples of their speech. In the so-called "historical" melodramas a great number of historical personages are introduced.³ In some cases the very words used by certain persons are incorporated in the text of the play. In *Charles-le-Téméraire* the stage represents a portion of the city of Nancy as it appeared at the time of the events recorded in the play, the author having taken care to render all details as exact as possible. The same play as printed is preceded by a preface describing the battle of Nancy of 1477, also by several diagrams and a "note historique" in which the author enumerates at length the many documents consulted by him in order to arrive at historical accuracy.

(d) THE "UNITIES" AND MELODRAMA

Contrary to what one might expect, the melodrama, at least until about 1815, showed itself fairly respectful of the classical rule regarding the three unities. It is true that there was change of place from one act to another, but the change in most cases was not a great one, while change of place within an act was very rare. In 1814, however, there is a remarkable instance of change of place within an act in the case of *Charles-le-Téméraire* (Act III). But Pixierécourt has the following footnote: "C'est la première fois que

¹*L'Homme à trois Visages*.

²*Christophe Colomb, Robinson Crusoë*.

³*Charles-le-Téméraire, L'Evasion de Marie Stuart*.

je me permets cette violation des règles dramatiques, et j'en demande pardon à mes juges." The unity of time is also largely respected, in that the events of a play all happen within at most twenty-four hours. But in 1818 Pixierécourt set a precedent with his *La Fille de l'Exilé ou huit mois en deux heures*. As in the case of *Charles-le-Téméraire* he excuses himself to public and critics on the ground that "la nature du sujet m'a paru l'exiger". M. Amable Tastu, in the "Notice" to *La Fille de l'Exilé* declares that in the reign of Napoleon ("ce génie de l'autorité") Pixierécourt would not have permitted himself this violation of the rules. Pixierécourt, however, did not suffer for his boldness. The public showed itself ready to admit (at least in a melodrama) what Napoleon would have frowned upon. By 1827 what was, in 1818, considered as a remarkable thing had become quite common on the boulevard, so that nobody wondered at Ducange's *Trente ans ou la Vie d'un Joueur*.

(VI) Conclusion

To sum up what has been set forth in this chapter will be to describe the melodrama of Pixierécourt partly from the negative standpoint and partly from the positive. Taking the negative first we have seen that: (1) the melodrama of Pixierécourt is not dramatic in the fullest sense of the word, but only superficially so. Physical violence for its own sake takes the place of that internal conflict which is essential in drama. The power to produce "emotional response", also essential, is indeed present, but the emotions aroused are of the crudest kind, being merely a succession of exciting thrills mingled with touches of pathos, while the means taken to evoke such feelings are unnatural and arbitrary; (2) melodrama (that of Pixierécourt at least) is not tragedy, in spite of the large place it gives to the "irony of fate" and to the depicting of the horrible. There is, indeed, the possibility of tragedy, but this possibility rarely becomes an actuality. True tragic effect is supplanted by a coarse imitation of tragedy, consisting of isolated, fragmentary outbursts of "futile melancholy and horror". The use of accidental means instead of logical development of the plot; the optimism which always provides a "moral" ending; the failure to identify character with issues—such things as these tend to destroy the germ of tragedy that exists in the melodrama of Pixierécourt.

From the positive point of view the plays of Pixierécourt abound in pathos, a sort of pathos which is sentimental and not tragic, a pathos which exists for its own sake rather than because of any inevitable association with the issues of a play, a pathos which is often episodic and nearly always exaggerated, which is created for the evident purpose of arousing a cheap emotional response, finally, a sort of pathos which concerns the weak and not the strong, and which therefore falls far short of the nobler pathos of true tragedy.

Finally, we are forced to the conclusion that Pixierécourt relies chiefly upon sentimental, sensational and spectacular effects to win success on the stage. These are the elements that have the strongest "popular" appeal, the elements that require the least amount of intellectual effort on the part of the spectator. Victor Hugo, in the preface to *Ruy Blas*, says that in the public there are three classes: the women, the thinkers and the "crowd". The "crowd" demands action, sensation, the pleasure of the eyes; the women demand passion, emotion, the pleasure of the heart; the thinkers demand character-study, the pleasure of the mind. The melodrama of Pixierécourt, like its successor, the Romantic drama, seeks to satisfy the demand of the first two classes—the third is left to shift for itself.

CHAPTER II

MELODRAMA AND ROMANTIC DRAMA—HISTORICAL POINTS OF CONTACT

The influence of the melodrama of Pixérécourt on the Romantic drama was clearly recognized in France during the flourishing period of the Romantic movement. Paul Lacroix (better known as Bibliophile Jacob) writes in the "Notice" prefixed to the play *Cælia* in Pixérécourt's *Théâtre choisi* (1841): C'est vous, mon ami, qui avez préparé les voies à l'école romantique, dussiez-vous, ainsi que votre émule et contemporain, Népomucène Lemercier, maudire et répudier vos enfants." Pixérécourt himself indeed tried to deny any responsibility for such offspring. In 1843 he declared that the authors of Romantic drama had neither his ideas, his dialogue, his manner of planning a work, his heart, his "sensibilité" nor his conscience. But he was then thinking chiefly of the lamentable difference between the morals of the good old melodrama and those of the Romantic plays—"Tous les estomacs ne peuvent pas supporter l'acide sulfurique."¹ The very protest is itself a witness to the fact that people in general recognized the close connection between the two genres. Charles Nodier, the defender of melodrama, himself one of the first Romantic "cénacle", declares that Romantic drama is only melodrama with the artificial pomp of lyricism added.² Paul Ginisty says: "Le mélodrame fut pourtant une bonne école de construction dramatique. Il donna carrière à la faculté de l'imagination; il avait secoué de vieilles règles étroites et il avait apporté de la liberté à la scène. Le romantisme . . . pourrait bien lui devoir beaucoup, et, après tout, lui emprunta nombre de ses procédés."³

The melodrama trained the public to enjoy a species of play in which the rules were relaxed, in which comic and serious elements

¹*Théâtre choisi*, tome IV (*Dernières réflexions sur le mélodrame*).

²Introduction to *Théâtre choisi de Pixérécourt*, p. VII.

³*Le Mélodrame*, p. 10.

were mingled, in which action took place on the stage and not in the "coulisses", in which the decoration was rich and varied. It also trained actors (and among them some of the most famous of the French stage) to put new vigour and expression into their acting. It provided theatres where new forms of drama were welcomed. It helped to acclimatize foreign drama in France. It spread the influence of foreign writers, among them Scott, Shakespeare and Schiller. It provided a field for the early dramatic training of certain of the leaders of the Romantic school. Finally, it introduced to the French public certain features peculiarly Romantic, even before Romantic drama itself had existed.

Long before the famous struggle between Classicist and Romanticist had come to a head in the "battle of Hernani", classical tragedy had been fighting in vain against the inroads of melodrama. All Paris was in the habit of rushing to the boulevards night after night, while the more dignified theatres were practically abandoned. The Théâtre-Français "jouait dans le désert", says M. Albert. In spite of Napoleonic subsidies and restrictive ordinances, the nobler houses remained empty and the boulevard flourished. How then could the new Romantic school avoid linking itself with an ally so powerful? And an ally that had for so long a time been fighting the same battle? In 1807 Geoffroy had said that in order to kill tragedy the melodrama needed only "deux bagatelles: des auteurs et des acteurs", that is to say, a better style and more highly-trained actors. Romanticism provided the first, the boulevard itself produced the second.

The boulevard was not by any means closed to literary influences or without certain semi-literary pretensions of its own. Pixérécourt, as we have seen, was extremely careful in his handling of the ancient rules. The language of melodrama, too, in spite of its only too obvious artificiality, was at least an attempt at a nobler speech than that of everyday life. Dialect is rare, except in the mouth of the conventional clown or peasant. Some of the authors of melodrama were well-educated men. Pixérécourt was a man of considerable learning, a "bibliophile". During the ten years immediately preceding the Revolution of July, the popular theatres underwent the influence of the literary and intellectual movement that was renewing poetry and art, philosophy, history and eloquence. Maurice Albert declares that there was on the boulevards "autant d'efforts variés et de tumultueux entrain que

dans les salons littéraires, les ateliers des peintres, les académies, les amphithéâtres de la Sorbonne et les imprimeries des journaux.”¹ Intellectual effort on the boulevard was by no means to be despised.

Many of the leaders in the Romantic movement were closely associated with the melodrama, some of them being themselves authors of melodramas. Charles Nodier, the friend and defender of Pixérécourt, who also acted as host to the Romantic group at the “Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal”, was the author of a melodrama entitled *Le Vampire* (1820). This is said to be the first play that Alexandre Dumas père ever saw in Paris.² Another play by Nodier, *Bertram* (1821), though called a “tragédie”, is really a melodrama.³ Nodier’s novel, *Jean Sbogar*, furnished the material for Pixérécourt’s *Le Belvédère* (1818).

Joseph Bouchardy, author of the melodramas *Le Sonneur de St. Paul*, *Gaspardo le Pêcheur*, etc., was a member of the “petit cénacle” and also “un élève enthousiaste de Victor Hugo”.⁴ He could repeat *Hernani* “d’un bout à l’autre” and was known as a “grand admirateur de Shakespeare”. His plays are so complicated in plot that it is almost impossible to analyse them without making the résumé of the play as lengthy as the play itself. “Il a fait”, says Gautier, “des charpentes de drames aussi enchevêtrées que les forêts des cathédrales” and yet Bouchardy was to Hugo, according to the same authority, “à peu près ce que Marlowe fut à Shakespeare”.

Alexandre Dumas père, whose introduction to Parisian drama was by way of melodrama, often collaborated with writers of melodramas. His *Richard Darlington* (1831) was written in collaboration with Goubaux, who, with Ducange, had produced the melodrama *Trente ans ou la Vie d’un Joueur* (1827). In the writing of several other plays—*Térèse* (1832), *Le Fils de l’Emigré* (1832), *Angèle* (1833), *Catherine Howard* (1834)—Dumas collaborated with Anicet Bourgeois, a melodramatist of considerable reputation.

Victor Hugo himself was no stranger to melodrama, or to the works of Pixérécourt in particular. The story is told in *Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie* that at Bayonne, waiting for escort into Spain, the mother of Victor hired a box at a theatre

¹M. Albert: *Les Théâtres des boulevards*, p. 279.

²Draper: *The Rise and Fall of the French Romantic Drama*, p. 16.

³Glachant: *Essai critique sur le théâtre de Victor Hugo*, vol. 2, p. 21, note.

⁴Gautier: *L’Histoire du Romantisme*, p. 25.

for a month. The three sons, Abel, Eugène and Victor (who was nine years of age) were taken night after night for seven nights to see and wonder at the same spectacle. It was Pixierécourt's *Les Ruines de Bâbylone*. By the seventh night they knew the play by heart. Six years later the youthful author started his dramatic career with *Inez de Castro* ("mélodrame en trois actes, avec deux intermèdes"). This play, so the author of *Victor Hugo raconté* says, was the "point de départ de son théâtre". That statement seems to be true in more ways than one.

In this play there is the usual melodramatic situations and procedure. The only typically melodramatic element not found is the comic. There is a ghost, which perhaps owes its appearance to the author's reading of Shakespeare or Voltaire. The play ends with the punishment of the wicked, the reward of the just, and the customary "moral" aphorism. It is a perfect "mélodrame" as the title declares.

In January, 1822, Hugo and Alexandre Soumet began collaborating on a play based on Walter Scott's *Kenilworth*. Soumet soon withdrew, and Hugo finished the play, which bore the title *Amy Robsart*. It was not until February, 1828, that this play had the honour of being performed—at the Odéon. Hugo had made a present of it to his brother-in-law, Paul Foucher, and only came forward to claim it as his own after the failure of the piece.¹

This play, especially in its earliest form (before being retouched for representation), is a typical melodrama after the fashion of Pixierécourt. There are the usual melodramatic conventions—secret hiding-places, documents, presentments, etc. There is the usual punishment of the wicked at the end of the play, the usual mingling of comic and tragic, the usual appeal to the popular love of spectacle and sensation. The dénouement reminds one of that of Pixierécourt's *La Citerne*, for in both plays the villain is finally destroyed amid the ruins of the castle in which he has taken refuge.

The mention of *Amy Robsart* brings us to discuss the influence of Scott on both melodrama and Romantic drama in France. Indeed the vogue of Scott in France during the period 1817-1827 serves as a strong link connecting melodrama with Romantic drama. His stories were eagerly taken up and, by various forms of dramatic juggling, turned into a tragedy, a melodrama, a vaudeville or an opera, according to the desire of the dramatist.

¹See P. et V. Glachant, *Op. cit.*, pp. 57, 58.

Mediævalism à la Scott became "the rage" on the boulevard, even before it did in Romantic circles.

A list of some of the melodramas inspired by Scott's novels will serve to show how great the vogue of that writer was in France, and how it affected the melodrama:

Ducange et Méré: *La Sorcière, ou l'Orphelin Ecossais*, mélodrame tiré de Walter Scott (1821).

Boirié et Lemaire: *Le Château de Kenilworth* (1822).

Pixerécourt: *Le Château de Loch-leven, ou l'Evasion de Marie Stuart* (1822).

Croisy et Béraud: *Charles Stuart, ou le Château de Woodstock* (1826).

Ducange: *La Fiancée de Lammermoor* (1828).¹

Alexandre Dumas, in 1821, tried to construct a melodrama from *Ivanhoe*, but the piece was never played. *Kenilworth* was especially fertile in dramatic progeny. The Porte-St. Martin put on a *Château de Kenilworth*, the Odéon an *Amy Robsart*, the Opéra-Comique a *Leicester*, the Comédie-Française an *Emilia*, all founded on the novel of Scott, and all within the space of a few months.² Alfred de Musset composed a melodrama based on a tale in *Redgauntlet*, and entitled *La Quittance du Diable* (1830). Dumas's *Richard Darlington* (1831) was composed largely as a result of reading Scott, while certain incidents in *Paul Jones*, in *Charles VII*, in *Henri trois et sa cour* (Act III, sc. 5) were derived from the same source.³

The vogue of Scott gave added impetus to a movement already begun in the melodrama. It stimulated the taste for historical settings, for "background", for picturesque details in scenery and costume. Pixierécourt had the same desire as Scott (without, of course, the latter's skill and imagination) to make the past live again, to reconstruct the life of bygone times for the delight and instruction of his own day. Such plays as *L'Homme à trois Visages*, *Pizarre, ou la Conquête du Pérou*, *Tékéli*, *Marguerite d'Anjou*, *Charles-le-Téméraire* are rich in historical detail, as regards both characters and background, and these all precede the vogue of Scott. In this way, as M. Albert says,⁴ "la voie était frayée aux

¹See F. W. Draper: *The Rise and Fall of the French Romantic Drama*, chap. II.

²Albert, *Op. cit.*, p. 286.

³Draper, *Op. cit.*, pp. 40-45.

⁴Albert, *Op. cit.*, p. 303.

Romantiques et le public préparé à comprendre et à goûter les drames d'Alexandre Dumas et de Victor Hugo."

The melodrama had a share also in making Shakespeare familiar to the French public. It helped to create a taste for Shakespearean drama which was later on to serve the Romantic movement. In 1805 Pixérécourt made use (in *Robinson Crusoë*) of the scene in *Macbeth* in which Birnam Wood marches on Dunsinane. During the Napoleonic wars Shakespeare was, of course, "taboo" on the French stage, but in 1817 J. B. A. Hapdé wrote a melodrama called *Les Visions de Macbeth*, and Cuvelier a "pantomime à grand spectacle" entitled *Macbeth, ou les Sorcières de la Forêt*. In 1818 the latter also produced *Le More de Venise* ("pantomime entremêlée de dialogues"). It was at the Porte-St. Martin, the home of melodrama, that an attempt was made (in 1822) to have Shakespeare rendered by English actors, in English, before a French audience. This attempt was a failure because of ultra-patriotic feeling, but it led to the publication of Stendhal's *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823). The managers of the Porte-St. Martin, having failed to present Shakespeare in his native tongue, decided to gallicize him, and produced in French *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Other theatres of the boulevard followed suit. In 1829 the Ambigu gave *Romeo and Juliet*.

The rôle of the Porte-St. Martin in the history of both melodrama and Romantic drama is a very important one. This theatre was originally built, at a cost of over one and a quarter million francs, to replace the Opéra, destroyed by fire in 1781. It was closed until 1802, when it reopened as the "Théâtre de la Porte-St. Martin", and became, with the Ambigu and the Gaieté, a home of melodrama. By the Napoleonic decree of April, 1807, there was given to each theatre in Paris a special kind of repertoire. To the Porte-St. Martin was granted the sole privilege of mounting melodramas and "pièces à grand spectacle". This privilege was indeed revoked by a later decree of the same year, a decree which closed all except eight of the Parisian theatres (of which eight the Porte-St. Martin was not one). It was not until two years later that this theatre was allowed to reopen, under the name "Jeux Gymniques"—a title which speaks for itself. After three years it closed again, to reopen in 1814, after the return of the Bourbons. It was then looked upon as one of the chief theatres of Paris, and patronized accordingly.

Even before 1807 the Porte-St. Martin had been frequented by "le beau monde". It had had a nobler origin than the other boulevard houses—the Ambigu and the Gaieté. There was a dignity, a spaciousness about it that reminded one of the more aristocratic theatres. Geoffroy compared it to one of the newly-rich financiers "élevés au-dessus de leur naissance par l'élégance de leurs manières". The lower classes did not find themselves at home there as they did at the Ambigu and the Gaieté.

After 1814, says M. Albert, "la Porte-St. Martin, qui est un des plus vastes théâtres de Paris, va en devenir un des plus importants. Il réunira et absorbera tous les genres, que ses rivaux devront se partager."¹ "Le tardif aveu des Classiques qu'on pouvait, sans se compromettre, admirer Shakespeare, Walter Scott, Byron, Lessing, Schiller et Goethe, est dû en partie aux théâtres boulevards et notamment à la Porte-St. Martin."² "Aucun théâtre n'est mieux disposé à accueillir les genres nouveaux, et dès cette époque, dès 1822, on peut prévoir qu'il deviendra l'asile du drame romantique et de ses représentants chassés de la Comédie-Française."³

It seemed, indeed, that here was a theatre ready to welcome the Romantic drama, and especially fitted to interpret it to the public, but the Romantic authors were for a long time determined to beat Classical tragedy on its own ground. Hugo, Dumas and Vigny each assailed the citadel of classicism—the Français—but the opposition proved to be too great; actors, directors and public were all more or less hostile. So the leaders of the new movement were forced after all to retreat to Romantic territory—the Porte-St. Martin. Dumas's *Antony* was withdrawn from the Français and given to the Porte-St. Martin. Hugo's *Marion de Lorme* followed *Antony*. Hugo, however, anxious for a literary rather than a "popular" success, tried the Français again—"les vers étaient impossibles au boulevard".⁴ *Le Roi s'amuse* was given to the Français. This play had an unlucky fate, however, as it was suppressed by the government after one performance, which was quite evidently a failure. Hugo returned to the Porte-St. Martin with *Lucrèce Borgia* and *Marie Tudor* (both written in prose).

¹*Op. cit.*, p. 257.

²*Op. cit.*, p. 306.

³*Op. cit.*, p. 259.

⁴*Victor Hugo raconté*, p. 384.

Not until 1835 did he go back to the Français, with *Angelo, tyran de Padoue*.

Lucrèce Borgia, finished before *Le Roi s'amuse* had been played, seems, by the very fact that it was written in prose and in three acts, to have been intended for the boulevard. In another circumstance also, in respect of this play, did Hugo bow to the custom of the boulevard—he allowed the use of orchestral music during certain scenes. "Bravo!" shouted Harel, the director, on receiving this permission, "au moins votre littérature n'est pas une bégueule".¹ There was hesitation in the camp of the Romantics at the disquieting news that *Lucrèce Borgia* was in prose. The "youth" began to question whether they ought to support such a departure from the high literary pretensions of Romanticism. A deputation was sent (among them Théophile of the scarlet waistcoat) to interview the author. They came away satisfied that "cette prose-là valait des vers et qu'on pouvait s'enrôler sans déchéance."²

The success of *Lucrèce* was phenomenal. The next day Harel came to see Hugo, and declared that the Porte-St. Martin was now the real Théâtre-Français, and that henceforth he would have "rien que de l'art, et du grand art". With *Angelo* Hugo went back to the Français, however, but insisted on bringing with him for that play the leading lady of the Porte-St. Martin—Marie Dorval. Hence the barriers between the boulevard and the "citadel of Classicism" were, to this extent at least, broken down.

Dumas, also, when he had made a name for himself with *Henri III* (at the Français) and *Christine* (at the Odéon), went over to the Porte-St. Martin with *Antony*, where he found two leading players, Dorval and Bocage, who were much more kindly disposed towards his play than was Mlle. Mars or Firmin (of the Français). Between May, 1831, and April, 1836, seven plays by Dumas were put on at the Porte-St. Martin, but only one (*Charles VII*) was played at the Odéon, and one (*Le Mari de la Veuve*—a comedy) at the Français.

The actress Marie Dorval, together with her famous colleagues of the Porte-St. Martin (Lemaître and Bocage), is another link binding the Romantic drama to the boulevard. All three received their training in the boulevard houses. Dorval and Lemaître had created a sensation in Ducange's *Trente ans ou la Vie d'un Joueur*

¹*Ibid.*, p. 399.

²*Victor Hugo raconté*, vol. II, p. 401 (Nelson ed.).

(1827). Eight years before that Dorval had played in Pixérécourt's *Les Chefs Ecossais*.¹ Many a persecuted heroine had she incarnated in the ten years immediately preceding the advent of Romanticism on the stage. This clever and versatile actress of the boulevard was destined to play the leading rôle in *Marion de Lorme*, the chief female part in *Antony* and in *Chatterton*, and the rôle of Catarina in *Angelo*. To her talent, her sincerity, her freedom from

restraint was largely due the success on the stage of these plays.

Prosper (Frédéric) Lemaître made his début in 1816 at the Variétés Amusantes, his first rôle being that of the lion in *Pyrame et Thisbé* (a so-called "pantomime babylonienne"). Later on he was engaged with the "Cirque Franconi", a sort of "trained horses show" called at first "L'Amphithéâtre anglais". The show had broadened out, however, and, from 1807 on, pantomimes and melodramas were given. Lemaître took part in such "pantomimes dialoguées" (really melodramas) as *Othello*, *La Mort de Kléber*, *Poniatowski*. In 1820 he was admitted to the Odéon, but his chief successes are connected with the Ambigu, the Gaieté, the Porte-St. Martin—and finally the "Théâtre de la Renaissance", founded expressly to propagate Romanticism on the stage. Lemaître's chief Romantic rôles were: Gennaro in *Lucrèce Borgia*, Richard Darlington in the play of that name, Ruy Blas, Kean.

Bocage, the third of this grand trio, created, among other rôles, those of Antony, Didier and Buridan. He seemed to be specially fitted for the part of the Romantic hero, "l'homme fatal". "Il était", says Gautier, "par sa personne, son talent et la manière dont il comprenait ses rôles, le véritable idéal du jeune premier romantique".²

Finally, certain melodramas, long before 1830, seemed to announce the coming of Romanticism on the stage. As far back as 1802, the play *Fanchon la Vielleuse* had familiarized the public with the peculiarly Romantic antithesis of the courtesan whose heart is pure, a prototype of *Marion de Lorme*.³ Pixérécourt's *Valentine* (1821) gives us another characteristically Romantic type in the young girl who sacrifices herself for the sake of love. *Les Fossoyeurs Ecossais* (1829) also by Pixérécourt, contains,

¹Ginisty, *Op. cit.*, p. 212.

²*Histoire du Romantisme*, p. 169.

³Albert, *Op. cit.*, p. 192.

according to Ginisty,¹ "toutes les horreurs romantiques". Alice, the chief character in this play, is a humble inn-servant, who falls in love with a student of medicine, Edouard, who had been brought to the inn after being wounded in a duel. She becomes a "subject" for surgical experiments in order to raise money to help her lover. The latter, after promising to marry Alice, goes away and forgets her entirely. She follows him, only to find that he is about to marry another. One night the "pourvoyeurs de cadavres" bring to Edouard a dead body for dissection. With a presentiment of dread he raises the covering and looks upon the dead face of Alice. This dénouement reminds one very forcibly of the fifth act of *Le Roi s'amuse*.²

¹*Op. cit.*, p. 87.

²Other melodramas that show typically Romantic traits are discussed in Chapter VI, viz., *La Tête de Mort*, *Le Belvédère*, *Le Monastère abandonné*.

CHAPTER III

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ROMANTIC DRAMA AND MELODRAMA IN RESPECT OF DRAMATIC QUALITIES

In Chapter II we have set forth that the essence of melodrama lies in physical, external conflict, conflict that is almost entirely on the surface, that exists for its own sake alone. Physical action, which is justifiable on the stage if it aids the understanding of the plot or if it gives an insight into character, is in melodrama used for the purpose merely of creating excitement and producing emotional thrills in the spectator. Also, in melodrama, an exaggerated use is made of suspense, which, as we usually know beforehand how the conflict will terminate (*i.e.* in favour of the "good" character) becomes a mere waiting for the expected thing to happen. Hence real dramatic value is practically non-existent. Thirdly, melodrama depends upon a complex, artificial plot, built up by the use of extraordinary devices. Let us see how Romantic drama compares with melodrama in these respects, beginning with the verse plays of Hugo.

In *Cromwell* there is a really dramatic idea: the conflict in the mind of Cromwell himself as to whether or not he shall be king. Ambition is strong on the one side, but prudence and superstition are able to snatch the victory from ambition. But this conflict, the truly central theme of the play, is nearly lost sight of in the hubbub and confusion of external action, in the busy coming and going of the many characters that help to fill this enormous stage. The dramatic foundation is hardly strong enough to bear the weight of the immense superstructure. Indeed *Cromwell* may be best described as a sort of historical (or pseudo-historical) farce.¹

In *Hernani* there is an overdose of conflict, much of it mental, it is true. There is plenty of dramatic material. The play is crowded with action, both internal and external. There is a three-sided conflict of wills: *Hernani* vs. the king, *Hernani* vs. Don Ruy,

¹But Act IV (*La Sentinelle*) is a perfect melodrama in itself from the dramatic point of view.

Don Ruy vs. the king. There is also conflict in the mind of the king between love and ambition (Act IV), in Don Ruy between love for Doña Sol and loyalty for his king, in Hernani between love and Romantic despair. So many conflicts tend to produce confusion. But the chief conflict after all, the conflict in which the hero is predestined to be defeated, is that between Hernani and Fate. Of this sort of conflict we shall have more to say later on.

There is abundance of physical action and violence. Several times the hero is on the point of fighting a duel. There is an attempted abduction and a successful abduction. There is a conspiracy and the capture of the conspirators.

Nerve-racking suspense is just as much a characteristic of this play as of any play by Pixérécourt. There is suspense in Act I from the time of the arrival of Don Ruy to the end of the act. In Act II we are continually kept guessing as to the probable fate of both Doña Sol and Hernani. Act III contains the tremendous suspense of the portrait scene. In fact the whole play consists of periods of suspense alternating with periods of conflict.

But, while this play offers so many points of similarity with the melodrama of Pixérécourt in these respects, yet we cannot fail to notice, almost at the outset, one remarkable difference: the peculiar use of monologues, soliloquies and colloquies "à deux". The action is often allowed to stand entirely still while a certain character utters a lengthy speech, or a pair of lovers express their sentiments in language highly lyrical.¹ Such scenes add nothing to the dramatic value of the play, though they may serve to cast light on character, or to heighten the pathos. In the melodrama of Pixérécourt monologues and soliloquies are merely explicative and expository, not introspective or philosophical. Their purpose is to explain action or give a reason for future action. But—and here we have the chief difference between Romantic drama and melodrama—the Romantic drama is chiefly concerned, not with action, but with self-expression. Romantic drama has other purposes besides the dramatic one, whereas in melodrama the achievement of a (sensationally) dramatic effect is always the chief aim.

In *Marion de Lorme* the dramatic idea is the conflict between the will of the Cardinal (representing Fate) and the will of Marion,

¹Act I, sc. 2, 3, 4; II, 4; III, 1, 4, 5, 6; IV, 2, 3; V, 3.

who is fighting to save her lover against Fate.¹ But note how, especially in the final scenes, the action swings from one side to the other, creating alternate hope and despair and holding the audience in excited suspense. In Act IV, scene 7, we have Marion pleading with the king, but in vain (despair following on the heels of hope); in scene 8 the king grants to Angély the very pardon he had just refused to Marion (hope again); immediately he tries to recall the pardon (suspense); in Act V, scene 2, Marion presents the king's order to the gate-keeper, only to find that the pardon is revoked by order of Richelieu (despair); one more chance is offered, she accepts (hope still exists); in scene 3, Saverny tries to bribe the jailer to let Didier escape, but in vain (another hope gone); in scene 6, Marion comes with a disguise to aid Didier in escaping (hope is bright now), but he refuses, the cannon-boom is heard, a sign that all is lost (blank and utter despair). How nerve-racking, artificial and melodramatic are these final scenes!

In *Le Roi s'amuse* there is real dramatic power shown in one scene only. It is the scene which depicts the struggle in the mind of Blanche between natural, physical terror of death and the desire to save the king's life at all costs. This is the only place where there is any mental action or conflict. There is a certain amount of physical action in Act II (the carrying-off of Blanche); there is play of wit and pathos in Act III; Act V is full of pathos but has no conflict whatever; only in Act IV is there anything like drama. And here everything that takes place reminds us of melodrama: the fatal accident that brings Blanche to the murderer's door just as the deed is about to be done; the wicked scheme itself; the horror of the situation, to which even the weather, in good melodramatic style, lends its aid; the awful suspense; the hair-raising details, such as the sharpening of the knife in preparation for the entrance of the victim—all these things represent pure melodrama.

The main conflict in the plays of Hugo is, as we have seen, the conflict against an overwhelming Fate. This conflict can end in only one way, in the destruction of the Fate-ridden character. Just as in the melodrama of Pixérécourt the dramatic value is lessened by the certainty of a victory for Providence and the hero

¹It is indeed Marion who is the real hero of the play. Didier is passive, the plaything of circumstance, but Marion is full of action, quick to invent schemes, ready to try any plan in order to save Didier.

in their combined struggle against the villain, so in this case the certainty of a victory for a cruel and unjust Fate detracts from the dramatic value of the play. The calamity is the result, not of a struggle between forces that almost balance each other, but of a struggle in which one side is weak and comparatively helpless.

We have already noted¹ that the melodrama of Pixérécourt depends for whatever dramatic force it possesses on a complex plot, built up by artificial, accidental and extraordinary means. The suspense is produced not merely by a conflict of wills, but by the injection into the plot of certain accidental and unexpected circumstances or events, which stimulate the interest and keep the spectators in a constant state of wonder as to what will happen next. It is by the use of such tricks as these that the plot is carried forward: disguises, eavesdroppings, clever ruses, secret hiding-places, documents, letters, physical objects. What of the Romantic drama? It is exactly by such means as these that the plays of Hugo, at any rate, are carried forward. It is by a mere accident that Hernani discovers that the king is his rival in love as well as his enemy; the king merely *happens* to overhear the plan of Hernani and Doña Sol to elope; when the king appears at the castle of Don Ruy, it is quite unexpectedly, and just after Hernani has also made his appearance there—also unexpectedly. As to secret places of hiding, we have the “armoire” in Act I, the “cachette” in Act III, the tomb of Charlemagne in Act IV. Disguise is made use of on several occasions.

In the prose drames of Hugo such aids to plot-motivation are still more frequent. *Marie Tudor* is full of them. It is by a combination of accident and secret plottings that the downfall of Fabiano is brought about. One example should suffice: In *Journée III*, scene 5, the queen, having relented, gives orders for the escape of Fabiano, but Jane overhears, and determines to save Gilbert instead; a disguise is furnished to the latter, who, in spite of it, is recognized by the turnkey. But the turnkey, who hates Fabiano, offers no resistance to the plan of saving Gilbert. The queen arrives to see that Fabiano is saved, but is just too late to discover the trick. Then comes the attack on the Tower, engineered by Simon Renard, who is unaware of Jane's scheme, and has taken a way of his own to destroy Fabiano. The queen is forced to yield to popular demand and once more orders Fabiano's death, but at the same time gives

¹Supra. Chap. I, section I.

a secret command to the turnkey to save him. Meanwhile the boatman has got away from the Tower with Gilbert, though as yet he is not far enough away to be unable to see the signal which is now given from the window. Will he return? Apparently he is about to do so, for the turnkey says to the queen "Je vous réponds de Mylord Fabiano, madame"—and yet after all it is Gilbert who is saved. The suspense and excitement produced by these final scenes cannot be surpassed by Pixérécourt himself, and it is always by accident or some artificial means that this suspense and excitement are produced.

In *Angelo*, too, there is the same use of well-known tricks of melodrama: (1) an omnipresent and omniscient spy (Homodéi); (2) the employment of ruse in order to get possession of an object necessary to the carrying of the plot (Tisbé and the key); (3) disguise; (4) important documents; (5) accidental discovery of important circumstances (Rudolph's mantle found in the apartment of Catarina, Tisbé's discovery of the crucifix); (6) the use of bribes to gain the help of someone of the opposing party; (7) the accidental overhearing of an important secret (Daphne hears Tisbé offering the poison).

It is evident that about the year 1831 a change came over Romantic drama. During the years 1829, 1830 and 1831 attempts had been made to capture the high-class theatres for Romanticism, in order to beat the classicists on their own ground. Hence the Romantic plays of that period are in verse, with few exceptions. Dumas, having begun his dramatic career in prose, had courted the muse in *Christine*. However, in spite of much enthusiasm and propaganda, Romanticism languished on the boards of the aristocratic theatres. Neither actors nor public were very friendly to the new drama. So that in May, 1831, we find Dumas giving *Antony* not to the Français but to the Théâtre de la Porte-St. Martin. Immediately after Hugo himself gave *Marion de Lorme* to the same theatre, and even drew up a contract promising to supply two plays a year to the Porte-St. Martin.

Both Hugo and Dumas, however, made another attempt to win success in the "théâtres du premier ordre": *Le Roi s'amuse* was put on at the Théâtre-Français (1832), and *Charles VII* at the Odéon (Oct., 1831). But there was an immediate return to the Porte-St. Martin with *Lucrèce Borgia* (Hugo) and *Richard Darlington* (Dumas). From this point on, the Porte-St. Martin may be

considered as the home of the Romantic drama. From Dec., 1831, to April, 1836, all of the "dramas" of Dumas were written for the Porte-St. Martin. Not till Dec., 1837 (*Caligula*), was one of his serious plays put on at the Français. Hugo, indeed, gave *Angelo* to the Français, but on condition that Mme. Dorval, of the Porte-St. Martin, should play a leading part.

This break with the first-class theatres corresponds to a very evident change in the Romantic drama, which after 1831 can hardly be distinguished from melodrama. Prose takes the place of verse (except for *Ruy Blas* and *Les Burgraves*). Moreover, a marked increase in the use of the methods and paraphernalia of melodrama can be seen. This has already been pointed out in the case of Hugo. It is all the more noticeable in the work of Dumas père. Before 1831, Romantic drama was only semi-melodramatic, after 1831 it is almost wholly melodramatic. In the earlier years the use of verse and the recurrence of certain peculiar types of character on the stage (the Romantic hero, the "ange pur", the redeemed courtesan) were the chief marks that distinguished Romantic drama from melodrama. After 1831 verse almost entirely disappears, while the characters degenerate for the most part into the well-known types made popular by the melodrama.¹

Before Dec., 1831, Dumas père had written *Henri III*, *Christine*, *Antony*, *Charles VII*. In all four plays there is indeed a large amount of melodrama as far as dramatic qualities are concerned. The plot is carried on by the use of typically melodramatic means. But as yet, at any rate, the intrigue is fairly simple, not overloaded with incident. Two at least (*Henri III* and *Charles VII*) are studies of crises, almost classical in their concentration. Even the time, in these two cases, hardly exceeds the classical twenty-four hours. *Antony*, also, has a very simple intrigue. This drama does rely on inward struggle chiefly, a struggle between passion and social obligation. Accidental and arbitrary means play but a very slight part. In *Christine* there is rather more of the melodramatic, in spite of the use of verse. The intrigue is much more complicated than in the case of *Antony* or *Henri III*. The plot largely depends on accidental and unexpected circumstances. We have, for example, the unexpected appearance of Paula in Act I, the secret passage leading to the palace in Act II (sc. 3), the private letter falling into the wrong hands (Act IV), the poison hidden in a ring

¹E.g. *Lucrèce*, *Homodéi*, *Buridan*, *Darlington*.

(Act V). It is by the use of such things as these that the play is carried forward. *Charles VII*, too, in spite of the simplicity of its main theme, contains many episodes that are highly melodramatic. For example, the killing of Raymond by Yakoub has very little to do with the main plot. It is simply a bit of horrible by-play. The trial and condemnation of the murderer, with the almost immediate granting of the pardon by the king, who unexpectedly arrives at that moment, is merely an interruption. In fact the whole portion of the play devoted to the king himself is really external to the main action. And it is in these externalities that the melodramatic features of this particular play are found.¹

Charles VII was given at the Odéon for the first time on Oct. 22, 1831. In December of the same year Dumas returned to the Porte-St. Martin with *Richard Darlington*, the first of a long series of his plays to be staged at this theatre, the first also of many plays written by Dumas in collaboration. In this series of plays there is, as we have already noted, a marked decline in the direction of melodrama. In order to show the thoroughness of this change from a semi-melodramatic plot to one wholly melodramatic, we shall examine briefly two plays, *Richard Darlington* and *Catherine Howard*.

The plot of the former is much more artificial and dependent on externalities than is that of any one of the four Dumas plays already treated. The underlying dramatic idea in this play is the conflict between the ambition of Richard and the love of Jenny, which forms the chief obstacle to the fulfilment of that ambition. This idea is simple enough and one which, if treated naturally and logically, might give rise to very dramatic situations. But simplicity gives way to complexity and a multiplicity of external and artificial devices are used to carry on the plot. First of all, there are the two persons—one evil, one good (in spite of his profession)—who, though supposed to be merely secondary characters, are really the prime movers in the play, Mawbray and Tompson. The former intervenes at intervals to aid and protect Jenny and to “déjouer les projets de Tompson.”² The latter thrusts himself into the limelight now and again in order to spur

¹*E.g.* The arming of the king for battle is a mere bit of sensationalism, highly melodramatic.

²Tab. III, sc. 5; Tab. IV, sc. 5; Tab. VI, sc. 1; Tab. VII, sc. 1 & 2; Tab., VIII, sc. 1.

the ambition of Richard, whenever it shows signs of lagging.¹ Thus the events are continually being forced into one direction or another by these external forces.

Secondly, the use of the familiar stage-tricks of melodrama is evident here from beginning to end of the play: it is by a bribe that Da Silva succeeds in opening negotiations with Richard, regarding the latter's desertion of his (pretended) principles for the sake of wealth and rank; Richard hides behind a thin partition to listen to a supposedly private conversation between Da Silva and Tompson, in which the project of a marriage with Miss Wilmor is mentioned; there is a secret interview with an unknown person who hands over to Richard several important documents to be signed in connection with the proposed alliance; there are plenty of unexpected appearances and surprise encounters; a very important secret is accidentally overheard by the very one who ought to be kept in ignorance of it; Jenny is accidentally discovered by Richard, hiding in a cabinet;² there is gun-play on the stage, when the wretch Tompson is killed by Mawbray.³ Physical action and the hubbub and bustle of excitement take the place of real dramatic conflict. Extraordinary events are continually taking place: In the prologue there is an "accouchement"; Tableau II is entirely concerned with the confusion and excitement of a hustings scene; later on we have Richard, by his eloquence, fighting the Ministry in the House of Commons; we have the gun duel between Mawbray and Tompson, and finally, the unseen though awful struggle on the balcony, as a result of which Jenny is hurled to death upon the cliff below.

The periods of suspense are tense with excitement, and long-drawn out—as in melodrama. Jenny, for example, has many chances of coming out of the trouble safely as far as her life is concerned: (1) she might consent to a divorce; (2) Lady Wilmor might have told Richard the whole secret of his birth instead of only half of it; (3) Mawbray might have revealed to Lady Wilmor the fact that Richard was her son, in which case the plans would have been interrupted; (4) Tompson might have succeeded in taking Jenny out of the country; (5) Mawbray might have revealed

¹Tab. I, sc. 4 & 5; Tab. II, s. 1 & 5; Tab. III, sc. 2, 3, 7, 8; Tab. VII, sc. 8, 10.

²Tab. VIII, sc. 3.

³Tab. VII, sc. 2.

the secret to Richard in time to prevent the crime; (6) Jenny might have escaped detection by hiding in the cabinet until Richard had left the house. But all these possibilities are set before us, apparently, for the purpose of raising our hopes for the safety of Jenny, only that they may be immediately dashed to nothing.

The plot of *Catherine Howard*, also, is one long series of melodramatic incidents and horrors. The story is full of improbabilities and surprises. Let us outline it briefly (if possible): Ethelwood, duke of Dierham, has married the beautiful but obscure Catherine Howard. Fearing to bring his wife into the presence of the corrupt Henry VIII, he lives for a year or so a double life, hiding his own identity from his wife, and at the same time concealing the marriage from the court. He even pretends to possess a desire for the hand of Princess Margu  rite, sister of the king, in order that the latter might the more thoroughly be deceived. Thus the situation is utterly melodramatic to begin with. Later Ethelwood learns, from the lips of Henry himself, of the latter's accidental discovery of Catharine and of his passion for her. The king even charges him with the duty of acting as an emissary to fetch Catherine to court. But Ethelwood, like Shakespeare's Friar Lawrence, bethinks himself of a narcotic, a feigned death, a public burial and a private resuscitation, by means of which Catherine would be dead to all the world but himself. By a trick he makes her drink the potion, then disappears to keep watch over the tomb, until she awakes. But, just as Catherine is due to rouse herself from the stupor, Henry arrives at the tomb, apparently to provide some horrible moments of suspense for Ethelwood and the spectators. However, Ethelwood, by dint of distracted efforts, manages to drag the king away a moment or so before Catherine awakes. Then we are shown the castle of Dierham, where Catherine is being hidden from the eyes of the world. She is now aware of her husband's identity, but the ambition for higher dignity and fortune has been awakened in her, largely because of a ring placed on her hand by Henry while she lay in the tomb. Suddenly the king rides up, and Catherine, ensconced behind a tapestry, hears Henry propose that Ethelwood shall marry Margu  rite. The king, incensed at the refusal of Ethelwood, leaves the castle threatening the latter with an accusation of high treason. It is now the turn of Ethelwood to drink the narcotic—the remaining portion of what he had procured for Catherine. Before surrendering himself to the tomb,

he hands the key of the vault to Catherine, whom he little suspects of infidelity. Her ambition, however, is stronger than her love for him; she goes to the palace, reveals herself as the supposedly dead Catherine Howard, and finally, dazzled by the offer of a queen's rank and fortune, consents to marry Henry; at the same time she drops into the Thames the key of the vault. Poor Ethelwood is doomed to a horrible death, no doubt! But lo! straightway he appears at court. It seems that there were two keys to this vault and the second had come into the hands of the king's sister Marguérite, who had thus been the means of freeing Ethelwood. Henceforth the latter becomes a man of mystery, a masked figure, known only to Catherine, and pursuing her relentlessly, that she may drink the cup of remorse to the bitterest dregs. She encounters him wherever she goes, whether in barge on the river, on horseback, or in the palace itself. He even has means of access to her private apartments. There he pays her a visit with the purpose of compromising her in the eyes of Henry, who discovers sufficient proof of her apparent guilt to accuse her before the Lords. She is condemned to death, but there is a chance of escape. Sussex demands for her the ancient right of "trial by combat". An unknown knight (Ethelwood) accepts the challenge and Sussex is killed. The hour set for the execution arrives, the headsman comes, according to custom, to ask pardon of his victim. Catherine seizes the opportunity to bribe him to leave London immediately, hence procuring a delay, during which she hopes to soften the heart of Henry by her appeals. But a new headsman appears in answer to the royal proclamation—it is none other than Ethelwood. All hope is gone, Catherine mounts to the scaffold, the axe falls. Then the pseudo-executioner removes his mask and announces himself as ready to undergo the same penalty as Catherine. No melodrama of Pixérécourt ever had a plot more complex, more full of surprises, more horrible, more dependent on external and material means than this.¹

As to the two original dramas of Alfred de Vigny, viz., *Chatterton* and *La Maréchale d'Ancre*, one cannot help noticing that they differ widely from each other in respect of their dramatic qualities. While the former has to do entirely with mental conflict the latter is largely taken up with conflict of a purely physical kind; while

¹We might have shown that the same can be said of *La Tour de Nesle*, but two examples ought to suffice to prove our point.

Chatterton is a drama of the soul, *La Maréchale d'Ancre* is a drama of events—and events of a purely melodramatic nature. The plot of *Chatterton* is of the simplest, that of *La Maréchale d'Ancre* is complex and intricate. In *Chatterton* there is very little use of external means to carry on the plot. A certain letter to the Lord-Mayor of London, the gift of a Bible from Chatterton to the children of Kitty Bell: these are of but slight importance in the intrigue. The drama is wholly within, in the minds and hearts of Kitty and Chatterton. There is, therefore, nothing of the melodramatic in this play—at least as far as plot is concerned. In fact *Chatterton* is the one notable play of the Romantic period which is wholly Romantic—i.e. lyrical, pathetic, tragic—and not a combination of Romantic and melodramatic elements. It is the drama of the individual against society, of the heaven-sent poet against the earth-born bourgeois, of helpless genius against all-powerful dullness. Hence a youth of 1835 could say: “Je viens de voir *Chatterton*. Je suis encore palpitant. . . . Le drame de de Vigny m’emplit; il circule dans mes veines; c’est mon sang.”¹ In 1877, on the other hand, this play was received with respect and coldness. By that time middle-class ideas had killed the Romantic fervour.

But in *La Maréchale d'Ancre* we have pure melodrama. What is Borgia but a very near relative of the familiar boulevard “villain”? He is the disturbing element, introduced into the plot to set things going; he is the one who has inside information on all points concerning the chief characters; he carries a certain letter, which, if published to the world, would mean the ruin of the powerful Concini. Concini himself is only another villain, but he plays a minor rôle to that of Borgia. Borgia holds the whip hand, and he is also the more clever of the two. Concini schemes to defeat Borgia, and secretly makes false love to Borgia’s wife in order to obtain the fatal letter. But he only succeeds in arousing the jealousy of Isabella, which later serves the enemies of *La Maréchale* as a means of getting rid of that redoubtable woman. Another thing that serves to embitter Isabella against *La Maréchale*, and that influences the former to swear a false oath against the latter, is the finding of the portrait of Borgia in the apartment of *La Maréchale*—a sufficient example of the melodramatic use of purely arbitrary means. The fight between Borgia and Concini in Act V,

¹Parigot: *Le drame d’Alexandre Dumas*, p. 360, note 1.

sc. 12, is highly melodramatic. Note especially the darkness of the night, the fatal spot (that of the murder of Henry IV); the sudden encounter, as if by accident, of two deadly enemies; the invisible thrusting of swords into the darkness; the realization, by the touch and the smell of blood, that each has wounded his enemy. The pistol-shot of Vitry comes (scene 13) to add a final touch of melodramatic horror.

The play unfolds itself in an atmosphere that is tense with excitement, and surcharged with violence; arrest follows arrest, first of one political leader, then of another; quarrels happen continually; there is fighting in the streets; burning and pillaging; a sensational trial, with a witness swearing a false oath to achieve the condemnation of the accused; a political revolution, entailing the exile of a queen, and the burning at the stake of her hitherto all-powerful favourite. It is melodrama, and nothing but melodrama.

To sum up briefly, it seems that the Romantic drama, as far as the "dramatic" element is concerned, is closely akin to melodrama, if not the direct descendant of it. During the early years of the movement, this kinship is not so apparent as after 1831, but it is more or less evident from the very first. There is manifested a strong desire for sensational effects, for physical conflict, for exciting suspense; there is increasingly a tendency to overload the plot with incident, to render the intrigue complex, to depend upon material, accidental and exterior means, rather than upon fundamental circumstances and the clash of character upon circumstances. Often there is indeed, especially in the earlier dramas (*Cromwell*, *Hernani*, *Antony*, etc.), a really dramatic idea, which, developed simply and naturally, would have been very effective, but this dramatic "germ" is usually lost sight of in the confusion of mere outward events. The conflict is usually an external one of will vs. will, which is the simplest kind of conflict, and the one most often occurring in melodrama (the villain vs. the hero). Once only do we have a drama which is concerned chiefly with a conflict that is wholly inward—*Chatterton*.

CHAPTER IV

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ROMANTIC DRAMA AND MELODRAMA IN RESPECT OF THE TRAGIC ELEMENT

Considering the Romantic plays in the same order as in Chapter IV, we deal first with *Cromwell*. In this play there is absolutely no tragic element. In this respect it differs greatly from the rest of Hugo's plays. *Cromwell* is a sort of vast canvas, on which the author has tried to set forth in great detail the characteristics of a whole epoch in English history, as a background for an intensive character-sketch of the famous Protector. Written largely for the purpose of exemplifying certain Romantic principles as applied to dramatic art, this play is above all a piece of propaganda work. Also, as we have already seen, it is conceived in an atmosphere of farce. The element of the "grotesque" is grossly exaggerated, so that an air of low comedy surrounds the play. It bears almost the same relationship to high comedy as melodrama bears to serious drama.

It is with *Hernani* that we come into the realm of Romantic tragedy. Judging from the "dénouement" alone, *Hernani* is one of the darkest and most horrible of tragedies. It is not a villain who suffers here, but a pair of tender, youthful lovers, and through no fault of their own. An evil Fate overtakes them, and at their moment of highest bliss, which heightens the horror of the calamity. Inexorable Fate, using as its instrument Don Ruy Gomez, overwhelms them—not a moral kind of Fate, as in melodrama and in Greek tragedy, but a Fate that is cruel, unjust, relentless, a Fate which is entirely the opposite of Providence.

There is something mystical, something unearthly about this tragedy. The shadow of death is over *Hernani* from the beginning.¹ He is in the power of Fate, "agent aveugle et sourd de mystères funèbres"; "poussé d'un souffle impétueux, d'un destin insensé." He calls on Doña Sol to flee from him: "détourne-toi de mon chemin fatal." Fate mocks him at the last: "Oh, que la destinée amèrement me raille." The very universe itself seems to bear a grudge

¹*E.g.* Act I, sc. 2; II, 3; II, 4; III, 4.

against Hernani. And Why? He has not broken any Divine command, or outraged any natural law.

The explanation lies not alone in the character of Hernani, nor in the necessities of dramatic exigency, but in circumstances entirely extraneous. Hernani, the Fate-pursued hero, represents the unhealthy pessimistic attitude towards life and the world which is summed up in the expression "*maladie du siècle*". He is a victim of doubt, of over-sensitiveness, of Romantic despair. He belongs not to Spain, nor to the 15th century, but to France and to the second decade of the 19th century. He is born too early by some hundreds of years, and born in the wrong environment. In other words, he is not logical, not natural, for he is not a character, a personality, he is a mere symbol—of young Romanticism. His death is not the result of any inevitable concatenation of circumstances, not a necessary outcome of previous events. His personality is not so "closely identified" with any "particular purpose or right" as to involve his destruction in order that "unity may be restored to the spiritual world."¹ We do not find in *Hernani* any "collision of spiritual forces" bringing about the final calamity. We do not find the two-fold aspect—of "rightness and wrongness"—in the character of the hero. Was it wrong to win the love of an old man's ward and marry her—by special command of the sovereign? Wherein, then, does Hernani sin, that this calamity should come upon him?

Again, why does Don Ruy persist in carrying out the terms of the rash oath at the end of Act III? Is it the result of outraged pride? Is it mere jealousy? Or is he simply a madman? The oath itself does not bind him to *demand* the death of Hernani, it merely binds Hernani to death, if and when the old man shall so desire. In any case the demand for fulfilment is not only criminal, but stupid, unreasonable, useless and unnecessary. The cause is utterly trivial as compared with the result.

Hence, although this play ends in horror, thus greatly differing from melodrama in one respect, yet the means used to bring about the conclusion are as illogical and arbitrary as those used in melodrama. Even the subsidiary events, such as the meeting of the rivals in Act I, the coming of the king to Don Ruy's castle in Act III, are purely accidental. The end and purpose of the play differ from those of melodrama, but the means used are the same.

¹Cf. *supra*, chapter I, section I.

We are horrified and filled with pity at the horrible outcome of *Hernani*, but our reason is not convinced. We are rendered sceptical by the very unlikelihood of the thing, by the magnitude of the calamity as compared with the triviality of the cause of it. Just as, in the case of melodrama, we are driven to doubt the easy optimism which always makes the good prevail, so in plays like *Hernani* we doubt the pessimism which, without any sufficient reason, destroys the good. In both types of play the end is pre-conceived and depends chiefly on an attitude towards life, external to the play, possessed by the author (in the one case), and by both author and spectators (in the other). The one is the outcome of dissatisfaction, melancholy and disillusionment, as the other is that of a smug satisfaction and an easy belief in the rule of a kindly Providence.¹

In *Marion de Lorme*, again, it is Fate that brings about the final calamity. Didier resembles *Hernani*—gloomy, sensitive, given to doubt, pursued by an unjust Fate, a man apart from men—in short, Romantic, a child of 1830, “funeste et maudit”. It is Fate, rather than Richelieu, that finally pronounces his doom. The Cardinal, though really the moving spirit of the play, is never seen. He remains in the background, an object of terror and hatred. Only once is his voice heard, awful, sepulchral, as from the closed litter he utters the fateful words: “Pas de grâce!”

Le Roi s’amuse reminds us of the Mosaic law which “visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children”. The calamity that overwhelms both Blanche and Triboulet is a fatal punishment for the latter’s share in bringing about the depravity of the king. It is the fulfilment of a curse (see end of Act I). It is poetic justice, providential retribution, irony of fate. Hence it very closely resembles the typical melodramatic “dénouement”. But the innocent child suffers as well as the guilty father. Romantic Fate exists side by side with melodramatic justice. Yet there seems to be more logic bound up with this calamity than was the case in the plays previously considered. The calamity of *Le Roi s’amuse* is indeed tragic, not because Fate has overtaken the wicked Triboulet, but because his innocent daughter has become inevitably

¹If we omit Act V of *Hernani* the play is not in the least injured. Indeed it is improved, for the conclusion thus arrived at is much more logical than the actual one. But such an omission turns the play into a melodrama pure and simple.

involved in the calamity. Triboulet has been so active in aiding the king's "amours" among the families of the courtiers that it is natural that they should try to retaliate in the same way. On the other hand, accident still plays a very large part. By accident the king has discovered the hiding-place of Blanche; by accident Blanche, in Act IV, overhears the conversation of Saltabadil and Maguelonne regarding the intended killing of Francis, and thus is led to offer herself as a victim. Here again Fate apparently forces events towards an unhappy conclusion.

But the author has his own purpose for this forced arrangement of events, a purpose which is not merely the usual Romantic one of showing the deadly power of Fate in this world, but a specially Hugoesque purpose. Here we note one of the central traits of Hugo's drama—symbolism. It is unpronounced in *Hernani*, it is clearly seen in *Marion de Lorme*; it is much more definite in *Le Roi s'amuse*. Triboulet is not merely the historical court-fool of Francis I. He is ugliness, transformed by paternal love, "la paternité sanctifiant la difformité physique".¹ Hence Triboulet is not natural, not human; he is simply the incarnation of an abstract idea. It is this element of symbolism which, like the element of Fate, causes the play to rise beyond the level of the natural to that of the supernatural. In this rarefied atmosphere almost anything may happen, except what ordinary earth-bound mortals expect.

In *Ruy Blas* this symbolism is carried to the extreme. All the main characters are symbolic. Don Salluste and Don César represent two aspects of a ruined nobility in a falling monarchy. Ruy Blas represents the people. But this is only one aspect of the play. There are several others: "Que chacun trouve ce qu'il cherche." Don Salluste is "l'égoïsme absolu, le souci sans repos", Don César is "le désintéressement et l'insouciance", Ruy Blas "le génie et la passion comprimés par la société", the queen "la vertu minée par l'ennui". Again, most unexpected and far-fetched of all, Don Salluste is "le drame", Don César "la comédie", Ruy Blas "la tragédie". The play has thus "un sujet philosophique, un sujet humain, un sujet dramatique". It is surely useless, in a work of so many aspects and so much symbolical meaning, to look for mere logic and reason.

Symbolism is rampant also in *Les Burgraves*, but we have shown

¹See preface to *Lucrèce Borgia*.

sufficiently how this element permeates the dramatic work of Hugo, and robs it of the very things one expects to find in drama. Just as, in the case of melodrama, logic is destroyed by the desire of the author to achieve an end separate from reality (*i.e.* to satisfy the demand for poetic justice), so also in the plays of Hugo, logic is destroyed by the desire to achieve an end separate from reality, an end which, however, is not "popular" but rather "philosophical". In both cases the interest is not purely a dramatic interest, and the purpose warps and destroys the element of illusion which must of necessity accompany true drama.

If, by a slight change in the conclusion of *Hernani*, of *Marion de Lorme*, of *Ruy Blas*, we give these plays a happy ending, we get pure melodrama—and the change would be but a slight one indeed; *Hernani* has only to be left alone in his married bliss; Didier need only relent a moment earlier; *Ruy Blas* has only to abstain from drinking the poison.

Two of the most important elements in Hugo's plays are the historical and the philosophical elements. Of these the first predominates in *Cromwell* and in *Hernani*. Both seem equally important in *Marion de Lorme* and in *Le Roi s'amuse*. In *Ruy Blas* and *Les Burgraves* it is the second which predominates. Let us see how the tragic value of these plays is affected by such considerations as these. In *Cromwell* the attempt to produce historical "colour" on a large scale detracts, as we have seen, from a purely dramatic or tragic purpose. Moreover, there is no attempt to disengage the deeper significance of human events. Everything is on the surface. Hence there can be no tragic effect. In *Hernani* the note of deeper meaning is indeed struck.¹ We do have a brief vision of human destiny, of the littleness of human greatness. But this is merely episodic, and above all, not dramatically expressed. In *Marion de Lorme*, in *Le Roi s'amuse*, in *Ruy Blas*, we are served out history, or what is supposed to be history, "par tranches", as a sort of dramatic "hors d'œuvres", without any attempt to discover the tragic value that might be contained therein.

But the part played by history decreases as the philosophical element grows larger. Richelieu in *Marion de Lorne* represents this element rather than the first. The "philosophical" characteristics predominate more and more, without destroying, however, the historical altogether. But the ideas put forward are largely only

¹In the famous monologue of Carlos, Act IV, sc. 2.

surface ideas, and do not concern the deeper problems of human destiny. For example, the rehabilitation of the courtesan by the power of love is not a tragic idea; the germ of tragedy lies, perhaps, in the fact of the impossibility of a total rehabilitation.¹ In *Le Roi s'amuse* the philosophical idea is the possibility of the existence of a pure paternal love in an otherwise thoroughly corrupted being. There is indeed something truly tragic here, viz., the duel between good and evil in the human heart. The idea that good and evil cannot co-exist too closely without fatal results is a tragic idea. In *Ruy Blas* the philosophical idea is that of the real nobility (and helplessness) of the people in contrast with the egotism of the upper classes. The people, strong enough to rise above a mean estate, noble enough to set an example to the higher classes, but yet helpless, by inherent weakness of will, at the critical moment of its history—that is tragic enough, if that is the meaning of the play. But the play has so many meanings, so many aspects, that they mingle and become confused. In the final outcome of the play, Ruy Blas is simply the Romantic hero, driven to death by a cruel Fate. He does not typify any people, or any part of humanity other than the Romantic “jeune premier”. In *Les Burgraves* the really tragic element is not the idea of fatality symbolized by Guanhumara, it is not the personal drama enacted in the lives of Job, Guanhumara, and Frédéric; the tragic idea is the thought of the decadence of a noble family from generation to generation. But this element lies entirely in the background.

The tragic element in Hugo's verse-plays is usually found in the part given to hopeless love. This is seen mostly in the lyrical parts, where intrigue is lacking, where action disappears and the human soul is laid bare.² The real tragedy lies in the existence of some immovable obstacle to love's fulfilment, where we could wish that no obstacle existed. As Lanson says: “Le tort de V. Hugo a été de ne pas oser s'affranchir de l'intrigue et de la philosophie pour créer un drame essentiellement poétique et lyrique.”³ To conclude, while the Romantic verse-drama of Hugo is on the surface tragic enough, yet we have seen that there exists in it the same tendency to exaggerate the idea of Fate (though in the opposite direction),

¹Cf. *Marion de Lorme*, Act V, scene 7, especially Didier's speech beginning “ne dis pas des choses impossibles.”

²Cf. *Hernani*, Acts II & V; *Marion de Lorme*, Act V; *Ruy Blas*, Acts II & V.

³*Esquisse de la Tragédie Française*, p. 144.

the same lack of logical development, the same use of accidental and external means, the same lack of connection between character and issues as in melodrama. If we apply the standard of Hegel¹ the result is "not tragedy, but a mere idle and futile melancholy and horror." The one type of play is as far from pure tragedy as the other. Both seek to arouse tragic emotion by artificial methods, but one stops short of tragedy, while the other overleaps it and "falls on t'other side".

Turning now to the prose plays of Hugo we find in *Lucrèce Borgia* a conclusion which is a mingling of the Romantic and melodramatic types. One of the victims, at least, is a "caractère sympathique". The audience is on the side of Gennaro. Hence, from a superficial point of view, his death is tragic. The death of Lucrèce is, however, only the removal of a villain, hence melodramatic. It is Fate, once more, that is responsible for the death of the hero. The crimes of the mother are visited upon her innocent son. The situation is like that of *Le Roi s'amuse*. In fact, as Hugo tells us, one play is the counterpart of the other.² Gennaro, moreover, is another typical Romantic hero, after the fashion of Hernani and Didier, hence he is doomed to die. His death results, however, from a very slight cause. Lucrèce, who had already saved him once, has taken every possible means to provide for his safety in flight, but he foolishly—and fatally—listens to the persuasions of his friend Maffio, and stays to share in the deadly supper at the Negroni palace. Thus the tragedy, if it may be so called, depends on a cause which is extremely slight and quite accidental, not upon any close identification of character with issues, or upon any collision between opposing spiritual forces.

The conclusion of *Marie Tudor* is purely melodramatic. The villain is destroyed, the worthy man saved. The audience has the ending it likes. But the possibility of a really tragic conclusion exists here. We might have been offered the tragic spectacle of a poor man's destruction, the result of his being inextricably entangled with high issues over which he could have no possible control.

In *Angelo, Tyran de Padoue* we have again a conclusion which combines Romantic and melodramatic elements. The death of Tisbé is Romantic. She could easily have avoided death. There

¹Cf. *supra*, Chapter I.

²See preface to *Lucrèce Borgia*.

was no need for her to destroy herself in order that Catarina might be saved, or Rodolfo be made happy, but, like the usual Romantic hero or heroine, she cannot survive disappointed love. In everything else this play is pure melodrama. The plot turns upon Tisbé's discovery (by accident) that Catarina, her rival in love, is also the person who had in youth intervened to save the mother of Tisbé from death. The gratitude of Tisbé makes her decide to save Catarina and Rodolfo for each other. All this is pure melodrama, but when Tisbé decides that she must herself die rather than witness the happiness of her rival, we are in the territory of Romanticism.

On the whole, in the prose plays of Hugo, there is, as we might expect, much more that is purely melodramatic and less that is peculiarly Romantic, than in the verse-plays. In one case—*Marie Tudor*—the Romantic element is almost non-existent. In the other two plays Romantic and melodramatic traits are mingled in about equal proportions. The workings of Romantic Fate are less evident, and an optimistic conclusion is conceded, as if not after all out of harmony with the Romantic formula. It is interesting to note that *Lucrèce Borgia*, the first of these three plays, though staged at the Porte-St. Martin, was not written with this particular theatre in view. *Marie Tudor*, on the other hand, was promised in advance to Harel, the director of the Porte-St. Martin. *Angelo* was given to the Français, the bargain between Harel and Hugo having been broken by mutual accord. Of the three plays *Lucrèce* has the most Romantic ending, *Marie Tudor* the most melodramatic, while in *Angelo* the proportions are about equal. It is quite evident that the author, especially in *Marie Tudor*, must have had in mind the theatre and the kind of audience to which the plays were destined. It is quite evident, also, that the author found no difficulty in adapting his plays to the requirements of the "home of melodrama", the Porte-St. Martin.

In Chapter I, sec. 2, reference was made to the "cult of the horrible" in melodrama, as showing how that type of play seeks to arouse the tragic feelings. One does not have to go far in the Romantic drama to discover instances of a similar and even more exaggerated use of the horrible. It is found in every one of the plays of Hugo, without exception: *Hernani* with its nerve-racking triple suicide; *Marion de Lorme*, with its "bourreau", and its "cannon-shot" announcing the doom of Didier; *Le Roi s'amuse*, with

Saltabadil sharpening his knife behind the door as he awaits his victim, the innocent Blanche; *Marie Tudor*, with the "bourreau" appearing twice on the stage, and the awful "procession of death" wending its way to the scaffold; *Lucrèce Borgia*, with its five coffins standing ready for their victims. Scarcely any detail of a calamity is left to the imagination of the audience; everything is set forth as boldly and sensationally as can be. Melodrama is surpassed and outdone on its own ground, for the audience has not the relief of seeing the "horrible" give way to the "satisfactory", the victim safe after incurring awful risks; the cup of horror must be drained to the very dregs.

Let us now consider some of the most representative plays of Alexandre Dumas père. In *Henri III et sa cour* the dénouement is really tragic. The sympathies of the audience are aroused on behalf of St. Mégrin and the duchess; there is a mingling of rightness and wrongness in the character of St. Mégrin; his personality is closely identified with the issues of the play, for he is merely the lover of the duchess, but one of the chief opponents of the League, hence he furnishes Guise with a twofold reason for hating him.

But there is in this play, as in the case of those of Hugo, a strong tendency to over-emphasize the horrible, which takes away from the aesthetic delight of pure tragedy and lowers the play to the level of melodrama. The strangling of St. Mégrin by means of the handkerchief of the duchess; the scene in which the duke, by the use of his mailed fist, forces his wife to sign the letter to her lover;¹ the duchess placing her arm in place of a bar in the rings of the door; the peals of thunder and flashes of lightning that accompany the tragedy;² such things are purely melodramatic and not at all necessary to the plot.

In *Christine* there is the same dwelling on the horrible for its own sake, the same appeal to the "nerves" of the spectators. Doubtless, Monaldeschi is a coward and a traitor, a mere "villain", and his death is not really a tragedy, but there was no need to go to such distasteful lengths in representing the destruction of even a villain. A sudden arrest, a sentence of death swiftly pronounced, a march of the guards escorting the prisoner to meet his doom—such was the usual procedure of disposing of the villain. But here

¹Act III, sc. 5.

²Compare the death scene in *Le Roi s'amuse*.

the wounded wretch drags himself bleeding and dying to the feet of the queen, in the presence of the dead body of the faithful Paula, who has just poisoned herself. The priest begs the queen to have mercy: "Eh bien, j'en ai pitié, mon père," is the answer, "qu'on l'achève".

Antony is a "tissu d'horreurs" from beginning to end. Crime follows crime, culminating in the assassination of Adèle by her Romantic lover: "Avoir commis pour te posséder, rapt, violence et adultère, et pour te conserver, hésiter devant un nouveau crime? . . . Satan en rirait."¹ The dénouement is tragic because Adèle at least has our sympathy and also because there is no other way out but that of death if her reputation is to be saved. The plot is at least logical, granted such a character as Antony and the blind love of Adèle. The former is, of course, the usual "homme fatal" of Romanticism, association with whom is deadly to those he loves. But in the character of Antony the Romantic hero has degenerated until he looks suspiciously like a villain, fiercely egotistical, stopping at no crime to achieve his ends. It is true that his crimes are due to passion, but even passion cannot redeem them. He is a long way from Hernani, Ruy Blas, and Didier, whose love is pure, and who are crimeless, even though "fatal". Antony is villain enough to deserve death, but that association with him should inevitably entail death for the harmless beloved woman—that is tragic.

Nothing could be more nerve-racking than the dénouement of *La Tour de Nesle*: Marguerite, at the tower, has placed her men at the entrance to kill her former lover, now her enemy, Buridan, as he comes supposedly to a "rendezvous d'amour" with her. Buridan, hoping to destroy both Marguerite and Gaultier, incites the jealousy of the latter by proving that Marguerite is false and that she has been responsible for the death of Philippe, brother of Gaultier. Soon after Gaultier has left for the tower with murder in his heart, Buridan finds out that the young lover of Marguerite is really his son and hers. He hastens to prevent a tragedy, arrives at the tower, enters by a window, hence avoiding the death that is awaiting him. A cry is heard on the staircase, Marguerite and Buridan make futile attempts to open the locked door, realizing that their son is being murdered. The door finally opens, Gaultier enters, bleeding and dying, hands Marguerite the key of the tower:

¹*Antony*, V, 3.

"Marguerite
Malheureux, malheureux! je suis ta mère!
Gaultier
Ma mère? . . . Eh bien, ma mère, soyez maudite.
(Il tombe et meurt.)"

Immediately Savoisie enters with soldiers and the order of the king to arrest those found in the tower.

As far as the works of Vigny are concerned, in *Chatterton* we find not only a tragic dénouement, but a situation that is really tragic in its implications as well as in its working-out. There is very little intrigue, so that the play is one of character largely, of inward action rather than outward. The pathos and the tragedy are due not to accidental means, or mere outward events, but to the shock of circumstances upon character. A genius, the prey of an unkind and misunderstanding world, realizes that he loves hopelessly and is hopelessly loved by a noble, virtuous woman. This alone is sufficient to urge him towards suicide, but when he discovers that the critics have robbed him of the honour of being the author of his own works, when he reads that he has been offered, as a special favour, the place of "valet de chambre" in the house of a stupid, proud, coarse-minded bourgeois, he can no longer stand the disgust and shame of it all. The situation has become unbearable to a proud, high-minded, sensitive soul. Suicide comes as the only solution. So far the tragedy is real, because logical. But the death of Kitty Bell is less intelligible. True, she bears a broken heart, but do people so easily and so quickly die of a broken heart? The phenomenal and famous "glissade" smacks of exaggeration and melodrama. Outside of that, however, there is little indeed of the "horrible" in *Chatterton*. Indeed, we seem to have here an example of the type of play which M. Lanson says Hugo ought to have created, the "drame essentiellement poétique et lyrique", of which we have isolated touches here and there in *Hernani*, *Marion de Lorme* and *Ruy Blas*. *Chatterton* is a real tragedy, not a tragic melodrama.

But what a contrast there is in *La Maréchale d'Ancre*. Here we have the horrors of melodrama served up in good style: two enemies fighting with daggers in the utter darkness, each unable to see when he stabs his enemy; Concini shot down in cold blood after being mortally wounded; the Maréchale d'Ancre herself, stopping on her way to death at the stake to make her young son swear

an oath of revenge over the body of his dead father. The difference between this play and the ordinary melodrama lies in the fact that even though all the characters destroyed are villains, yet all the villains are not destroyed, and those who are victorious for the time being are as bad as their victims. There is a much greater use of intrigue in this play than in *Chatterton*. The tragedy is not here the result of the shock of circumstances upon character, but the result of dark plotting and secret enmities. We are in the atmosphere of melodrama.

To sum up, it appears from what has been discussed in this chapter, that the Romantic writers in their earlier and more "literary" works especially, aimed to achieve "tragedy" by substituting for the optimistic formula of melodrama a pessimistic formula of their own, partly because of the prevailing pessimism of the age, partly, perhaps, from the necessity of competing with classical tragedy. In their later works there is a tendency, even in this respect, to harmonize with melodrama or at least to unite Romantic and melodramatic elements. But even the (supposedly) tragic effect of Romantic drama is really melodramatic in the means used to achieve it, *i.e.* the use of arbitrary and accidental elements creating the "intrigue". An unhappy ending is almost inevitable in a Romantic play, but inevitable only because of the author's attitude to life, not because of logical development in character or circumstance. It is usually easy, without disturbing the logic of such a play, to alter the dénouement so as to give a purely melodramatic ending. A minute or so of time, for instance, makes a wide world of difference.¹

As far as the tragic element is concerned, Romantic drama differs from melodrama chiefly by an exaggeration of two traits that are characteristic of melodrama: the use of horrible effects, and the employment of Fate as a tragic force. The possibility of real tragedy exists in both melodrama and Romantic drama, but it is generally passed by, either for the sake of a paltry, sensational appeal to "nerves", or for the sake of a falsely "philosophical" code. In both cases an end separate from reality is obtained; though the end differs according to the philosophical notions of the writers, the means employed to achieve the end are in each case the same.

¹As in *Marion de Lorme* and *Richard Darlington*.

CHAPTER V

PATHETIC, SENTIMENTAL AND SENSATIONAL ELEMENTS IN ROMANTIC DRAMA, CONSIDERED IN THEIR RELATION TO THE MELODRAMA

(I) *The "Pathetic" in Romantic Drama*

We have seen¹ that the pathetic element is very strong in melodrama, but that the kind of pity induced is merely sentimental and not tragic. Pathos, in melodrama, does not arise out of the inevitableness of any tragic situation, it is not found in intimate connection with any tragic outcome, it exists by and for itself, and occurs for the most part episodically. It is concerned chiefly with the weak and helpless in the time of trouble rather than with the strong in the hour of tragic defeat. How does the pathos of melodrama compare with the pathos of the Romantic drama?

The pathetic is indeed an important element in the plays of Victor Hugo. We have the fifth act of *Le Roi s'amuse*: Marion's pleadings before the king and before Didier; her despair in the final act of *Marion de Lorme*; *Hernani*, parts of Acts II, III and V; *Ruy Blas*—the final scenes. In all but one of these cases the pathos arises from love rendered desperate or disappointed. The one exception is that of *Le Roi s'amuse* where pathos is due to the grief of a father at the death of a daughter. Hence there is a difference, immediately apparent, from the pathos of melodrama which is not generally concerned with love, but largely with domestic and social affections. The pathos of melodrama is connected with morality and the "bourgeois" virtues, that of the Romantic drama has to do chiefly with the unfulfilment of passionate love. We are asked to sympathize not with the orphan, the aged, the destitute or the helpless, but with unhappy lovers.

Another important difference between Romantic pathos and that of melodrama is that while in the latter case the pathetic situations are more or less common-place, typical, generalized,²

¹Supra, chapter I, sec. III.

²E.g. A mother distracted at the prospect of losing her children; a woman persecuted by an enemy in the shape of a wicked husband; a helpless orphan pursued by a villain.

in the former case the situations are usually extraordinary, peculiar, individualized. Much of the pathos of *Le Roi s'amuse*, for example, arises out of the fact that Blanche is the daughter of Triboulet, who is by no means an ordinary sort of father.¹ The fact that Triboulet is but a clown, living amidst the splendours of a royal court; that he is utterly depraved, except for the one divine spark—paternal love—that burns in his heart; that he is alone in the world except for the companionship of his daughter; that he has brought her up so carefully and lovingly—all these things must be taken into consideration as heightening the pathos of the situation and placing it on a level above the ordinary. The spectator is not asked, as in melodrama, to sympathize with Triboulet merely as father, but with Triboulet as both Triboulet and father. It is the same with *Lucrèce Borgia*, where pathos arises not especially from the fact that a mother unwittingly compasses the death of her son, or that a son unknowingly kills his mother, but from the fact that this mother is a *Borgia* in whom mother-love stands out in bold relief because of the awful blackness of her crimes, and who, because of these very crimes, does not dare to reveal herself until the fatal blow has been struck.² And so with *Hernani*, *Marion de Lorme*, *Ruy Blas*—in each case the pathetic situation arises partly at least because of some peculiarity, some extraordinary circumstance connected with the characters themselves.

But in spite of those very evident differences there is indeed much in common between the pathos of melodrama and that of the Romantic drama. It is true that we are not asked to sympathize with the weak in body, or with those who lack physical means of protection, but the heroes of Romanticism are weak in will if not in body, the mere playthings of Fate. Moreover, even from a physical point of view, they usually possess some characteristic which renders them the especial objects of considerate regard: the noble John of Aragon has been forced to renounce his rank and his wealth and become a mere bandit; the clever, refined, incorruptible statesman, Ruy Blas, is really a humble lackey in the service of a harsh master; Antony, Didier, have been abandoned by their parents. From the very first these so-called "heroes" make a bid for our sympathy because of some unfortunate circumstance connected with them. They are weaklings, unfortunates,

¹Nebout: *Op. cit.*, p. 234 ff.

²Nebout, p. 239 ff.

not strong men fighting their own battles with all their powers about them. They are handicapped from the start. Hence the pity which they inspire is after all largely of the sentimental, melodramatic kind, not of the truly tragic type.

Moreover, the pathetic element in Romantic drama is found not only in association with the tragic outcome, but in episodic occurrence; it exists largely for its own sake. The progress of the story is held up while a character pours out lengthy complaints, or indeed the play is carried on beyond its dramatic conclusion by the addition of scenes of pure pathos. Consider the final act of *Le Roi s'amuse*: scenes 4 and 5 have no "raison d'être" except for the purposes of pathos. The author apparently wanted to give the spectators a full view of Triboulet's piteous writhings at the awful discovery that he had compassed the death of his own daughter.¹ Hence we have two fairly long scenes, composed of frenzied cries, prayers, entreaties, questionings, apostrophes, distracted calls for help, frantic gestures.

It is important, also, to note here by what means this grief of Triboulet's is expressed. It is not only by words, but also by looks, gestures, actions of one sort or another, that he exhibits the feelings that overflow his soul. Physical expression of grief enters largely into the pathos of Romantic drama. Triboulet throws himself in despair on the body of his dying child, kisses it frantically, tears his hair, violently rings a bell to summon help, takes a bystander by the neck and half-throttles him ("As-tu des des chevaux, toi, manant? Une voiture? dis?"), finally falls heavily on the ground, overcome with the force of his despair. All this might be natural enough under the circumstances, but it is rather out of place in a purely "dramatic" composition. It exists merely for its effect on the nerves of the spectators. It is an exaggeration of one of the distinctive traits of melodrama, and is very probably an inheritance from the older pantomime plays.²

Another example of the exaggerated use of gesture and action to indicate feeling is found in Vigny's *Chatterton* (Act III, sc. 1). A simple reading of the stage-directions alone is sufficient to give an insight into the condition of Chatterton's mind: "Il est assis sur le pied de son lit et écrit sur ses genoux. . . . Il se lève. . . .

¹P. Nebout: *Le Drame Romantique*, p. 262.

²A good example of this sort of thing in melodrama is found in Pixérécourt's *Les Maures d'Espagne*, Act II, sec. 12.

Il rit et se rassied. . . . Il écrit. . . . Il s'abandonne à une longue rêverie, dont il sort violemment. . . . Il lit. . . . Il déchire le manuscrit, en parlant. . . . Un peu de délire lui prend. . . . Il porte la main à sa tête. . . . Il se lève et marche à grands pas. . . . Il pleure longtemps avec désolation. . . . Il s'arrête. . . . Il prend une tabatière sur la table. . . . Il jette la boîte. . . . Il court après, se met à genoux et pleure. . . . Il fond en larmes, etc., etc. . . ."

Again, "tragic pathos" depends on conditions that are essentially inherent in the circumstances of a play, not on events that happen more or less arbitrarily in the course of an intrigue. The pathos of a situation like that of Hamlet, the cultured idealist and dreamer urged to play the part of avenger of a murdered father upon a murderer-uncle, or of Chimène, hesitating between filial respect for a dead father and love for the one who slew him—such a type of pathos is inherent in the fundamental conditions of the play. There is no possible "getting-away" for Hamlet or Chimène. In the case of melodrama, on the other hand, pathos arises out of a more or less complicated intrigue, not from any essential or unalterable conditions inherently present. The pathetic situation is arranged for at will, visibly induced by the author, and terminated when he so desires. This is true, also, to a very great extent, of the Romantic drama. We must, however, except both *Chatterton* and *Antony*, since, in these two cases, the intrigue counts for very little. The calamity with which each of these two plays ends is merely the culmination of a pathetic situation which existed from the first. The events of the plot in each case add but little to the pathos.

In the plays of Dumas père we do not find so much of the pathetic element as in those of Hugo. The former author seems to seek for effects which are rather horrible than merely pathetic, rather sensational than sentimental. The scenes of tragic dénouement are more abrupt, more swiftly conducted, than is the case in the plays of Hugo.¹ There is less time, and also less inclination, for pathetic complaint; on the other hand, there is more action, more dramatic force, in the conclusions of Dumas. But where a pathetic situation does arise it is usually episodic, or arises out of the events of the intrigue, and is not induced by circumstances

¹Compare the final scenes of *La Tour de Nesle*, *Henri III*, *Richard Darlington*, with those of *Hernani*, *Lucrèce Borgia*, *Le Roi s'amuse*.

inherent in the play. Thus the scene in *Henri III et sa cour*,¹ depicting the mental and physical sufferings of the duchess at the hands of Guise, does not necessarily take place because of the fundamental data of the play, but merely to help on the intrigue—only in this way can the duchess be forced to send the compromising letter to St. Mégrin. Again, in *Christine*, the pathetic scenes are those in which Paula is concerned, scenes which are for the most part aside from the action of the play.

(II) *The "Sentimental" in Romantic Drama*

Says Charles-Marc des Granges: "De même que Corneille transformera la tragi-comédie en y introduisant les passions, et par là l'interêt psychologique,—ainsi Dumas et Hugo s'empareront du mélodrame et, en y mettant le lyrisme, feront prédominer eux aussi les sentiments sur les situations."² And it is just here that perhaps the chief difference lies between melodrama and Romantic drama. Not that the Romantic drama neglects the situations (*i.e.* the intrigue)—far from it—but the emphasis is shifted. The intrigue is no longer the chief thing, it serves merely to place the characters in such circumstances as will arouse sentiment, both in the characters themselves and in the audience. Judged according to this formula, the earlier dramas of Hugo and Dumas are more "Romantic" than the later ones, and of the two authors Hugo is the more consistently "Romantic". Even in *Marie Tudor* and *Angelo*, where the intrigue is most complicated, sentiment is really the important thing. In the first case the author is trying to show that a queen can have the feelings of an ordinary woman, in the second he tries to prove that gratitude can be stronger than love in the heart of even a despised woman. But, with regard to Dumas, except in the earliest plays—*Henry III*, *Christine*, *Antony*—the intrigue is all-important. What part does sentiment play in *La Tour de Nesle*? Surely a very minor part. And in *Richard Darlington*, or in *Catherine Howard*? Still less.

In most cases the sentimentality of Romantic drama appears to be very different from that of melodrama. "Sensibilité" and "sensiblerie" have given place to passion. The overpowering sentiment of Romantic drama is love, which is in melodrama

¹Act III, scene 5.

²*Geoffroy et la critique dramatique sous le Consulat et l'Empire*, p. 404.

largely neglected, or at least greatly restrained. In the melodrama love is almost always the chaste, virtuous, restrained affection of a married pair, or of a couple already betrothed. Hardly ever in melodrama do we find a woman who loves where duty says she ought not to love, though occasionally a man does so.¹ In the latter case, however, the man is looked upon as a traitor, and as such forfeits our esteem; he usually has other crimes to his credit as well. Unsanctioned love is looked upon as a crime comparable to other sins against the community, and is distinctly frowned upon. Valentine commits suicide, not because she regrets the loss of Edward's love, but because she cannot endure the sense of shame and social disgrace, in spite of the fact that she herself is entirely innocent. In the melodrama "un crime d'amour" is a crime like another, but in Romantic drama it is scarcely a crime at all. Passion excuses many things.

The Romantic attitude towards love is one of the symptoms of the "maladie du siècle".² The Romantic drama does not portray love as bound by ordinary earth-made ties. Love is here a divine passion, not to be controlled by man-made laws or customs. It is the ideal union of two souls born for each other, though often separated by force of circumstances. Love has the right to defy circumstances—by which is meant social laws and conventions (cf. *Antony*)—or at least to hope for the consummation of a perfect union in eternity with the beloved (cf. *Hernani*).³ There is something ideal, something spiritual in Romantic love, even when, as in *Antony*, it leads directly to adultery and other crimes. But for the most part this kind of love is indeed pure. Chatterton and Ruy Blas both die to preserve unspotted the reputation of the beloved lady. The loves of *Hernani* and of *Didier* are beyond reproach. Indeed, Romantic love often purifies from the stain of an unworthy passion. It lifts the lover to the highest summit of self-sacrifice and devotion, so that it becomes easy, even sweet, to die for the beloved.

Romantic love takes little account of ordinary, worldly ideas of honour because it looks beyond this world. Love in the melodrama is earthly, it must give way to duty, to religion, to the social customs. Even *Edouard*, who has betrayed *Valentine*,

¹E.g. Zamoski in *Les Mines de Pologne*, *Edouard* in *Valentine*.

²Nebout, *Op. cit.*, Livre IV, pp. 146 f, also Livre V.

³Act V, sc. 6—"Partons d'un vol égal vers un monde meilleur."

suffers remorse for having outraged the laws of society, and makes a speech in defence of worldly "honour".¹

Love-making scenes are very infrequent in melodrama. Love, when it forms a part of the intrigue, is more or less taken for granted. The play *Valentine*, in which love is very important, begins *after* Edouard has wooed and won the heart of Valentine, and is concerned not so much with guilty love as with the effects of it. It is the moral, rather than the passion, which bears the emphasis. The hero and heroine of melodrama, if they are in love, do not describe their feelings for the benefit of the audience, they are too busy for that; love is only an incident in their career, and not the all-important event of their lives. On the contrary, in Romantic drama, love is almost the only theme, the absorbing interest and passion of the chief characters; other kinds of sentiment, especially the "social" sentiments, gratitude, humanity, charity, loyalty, compassion are comparatively rare and unimportant, or when they do exist, differ greatly from the same sentiments as portrayed in melodrama. There is sympathy, there is mercy, portrayed in the Romantic drama, but not a humane sympathy, not a kind of mercy that has its origin in social feeling. The "sensibilité" of Romanticism, like its pathos, is individualized, contracted, particular. There is sympathy for a genius misunderstood by a cruel world, pity for a lackey with a kingly soul, mercy for a courtesan reformed by love. It is always the exceptional, the bizarre, that furnishes the cause for sentiment, never the ordinary, the common. Even the family affections are individualized, exceptional: Triboulet is not an ordinary father, nor Lucrece an ordinary mother.²

So far we have considered chiefly the *differences* between Romantic drama and the melodrama in regard to the sentimental element. But these differences are, after all, more apparent than real. In fact, the "sentiment" or "passion" of Romantic drama is largely a development of that very "sensibilité" which characterizes the melodrama of Pixérécourt.

We have already noted that the Romantic drama places sentiment above intrigue. Indeed, the success of this kind of drama, shortlived as it was, is chiefly to be ascribed to the "appealing power" of the passion it portrayed. Says La Vicomtesse in *Antony* (Act IV, sc. 1): "Voulez-vous me dire où vous prenez ces scènes

¹ *Valentine*, I, sc. 6.

² Nebout, *Op. cit.*, p. 232 f.

de feu qui vous ont fait réussir au théâtre? Car vous avez beau dire, c'est là qu'est le succès de vos pièces, et non dans l'historique, les mœurs, la couleur locale. . . ." She might have added "ni dans l'intrigue". The passion of Romantic drama answered to something in the souls of those who listened to it, especially the youthful part of the audiences. Le Breton says:¹ "*Antony* a plu, en second lieu, par le lyrisme de la passion, c'est-à-dire par l'exaltation folle et continue qui se manifeste dans le langage et dans les actes des deux personnages principaux. Cette exaltation, si théâtrale qu'elle nous paraisse aujourd'hui, a plu infiniment parce qu'elle se retrouvait dans l'âme de toute une génération. La génération romantique était née dans la fièvre, elle a vécu dans la fièvre. . . ."

But this passion, this "exaltation folle . . . qui se manifeste dans le langage et dans les actes", which is indeed the outstanding characteristic of the Romantic movement, is not altogether something new and foreign grafted on to French life and letters of the period. It is not entirely due to the cult of Byron. It is largely the outcome of the development of that very "sensibilité" which the eighteenth century bequeathed to the nineteenth, and which is found so plentifully in the melodrama itself. From this standpoint the melodrama is not only the descendant of "le drame bourgeois", but it is also the ancestor of Romantic drama.

The eighteenth century "sensibilité" was indeed a form of Romanticism. It possessed many of the characteristics of Romanticism. It was, for example, egotistical. The sensitive man found a sort of delight in much weeping. Marivaux, as early as 1722, in the *Spectateur Français*, speaks of the necessity (for a sensitive soul) "de ne rien perdre de la douleur". There is a sort of selfish delight in constantly hugging to oneself feelings of pity and sympathy for others in unhappy circumstances.² Again, "sensibilité", like Romantic passion, was not to be hidden, but to be paraded before the eyes of men. In the eighteenth century one was almost ashamed not to be seen weeping copiously at the plight, real or imaginary, of some unfortunate. Sentiment was looked upon as the highest virtue, everyone "s'efforçait de sentir le plus possible".³ Then, too, "l'homme sensible" believed in the goodness of nature, especially after Rousseau's time. The natural instincts were, he

¹*Le Théâtre Romantique*, p. 48.

²Cf. Lanson, *Nivelle de la Chaussée*, p. 229.

³Lanson, *Op. cit.*, p. 232.

thought, reliable guides to conduct. Hence will-power and reason, self-discipline and self-control were largely forgotten.

Sentiment, thus allowed to grow and develop, tended more and more towards passion and frenzy—"l'honnête homme sera un frénétique".¹ We have only to eliminate the social (that is to say the "moral") element, and we shall then see that the "sentiment" of the later 18th century "drame bourgeois" closely resembles the "passion" of the Romantic drama. In the "dramas" of Baculard d'Arnaud and of Mercier love becomes a force irresistible, breaking down the strongest barriers of religion and social custom, declaring its own inherent goodness in the face of the opposition of man's laws and conventions, with a frenzy that reminds us forcibly of Dumas's *Antony*.²

But a generation elapses between Baculard d'Arnaud and Alexandre Dumas père, and meanwhile "le drame" is practically driven from the stage, except in the popular form of melodrama. Hence, if Romantic drama inherits anything of that "sensibilité" which characterized "le drame", it can hardly be from "le drame" itself directly. It is much more likely to be from the melodrama. We are now ready for the question: Does the "sensibilité" of the melodrama resemble the Romantic "passion"? At first one is tempted to answer "No". The two appear to be poles apart. In the eyes of Pixérécourt the exaggerated passion of Romantic drama was a wicked, dangerous and highly immoral thing. This is how he speaks of it: "Jadis on choisissait seulement ce qui était bon; mais dans les drames modernes, on ne trouve que des crimes monstrueux qui révoltent la morale et la pudeur. Toujours et partout l'adultère, le viol, l'inceste, le parricide, la prostitution, les vices les plus éhontés, plus sales, plus dégoûtants l'un que l'autre."³ But this simply means that the melodrama stands for the so-called "moral laws" of society, while Romantic passion knows no law but its own fulfilment. Let the melodrama once cast overboard its moral preoccupations, and we shall see that it too can easily deserve the same condemnation. We have, indeed, an example showing how easy it was for "the school of virtue" to become "the

¹*Ibid.*, p. 239.

²Cf. Baculard d'Arnaud: *Le Comte de Comminges*, I, 6 (the speech of Comminges beginning "Ma chaîne est éternelle"), also Mercier: *Zoé*, I, 2 & 3.

³Pixérécourt: *Théâtre choisi*, tome IV, p. 497 (*Dernières réflexions sur le mélodrame*).

school of vice" in the case of the melodrama *L'Auberge des Adrets* in which, by the genius of Frédéric Lemaître, the rôle of the villain Robert Macaire is rendered comic and partly at least, "sympathetic". Says Faguet of this: "C'était tout le système dramatique de Pixérécourt qui était 'inversé'".¹ It is indeed, above all, this moral preoccupation which mostly differentiates the sentiment of melodrama from that of the Romantic drama.

But, on the other hand, there are in the melodrama itself signs presaging, as it were, the coming storm of Romantic passion. It is true that love plays comparatively a slight rôle in the earlier plays of Pixérécourt, but after 1817 that rôle notably increases in importance. We have, indeed, several plays of which love is the chief subject, all terminating in a way which is tragic for one or both of the lovers: *Valentine* (1821), *L'Évasion de Marie Stuart* (1822), *Alice* (1829). It seems that the later melodramas of Pixérécourt are occupied more and more with the question of unhappy love. It is significant that this change in the attitude of the melodrama towards love coincides with the introduction of certain other traits which later come to be looked upon as distinguishing the Romantic drama. We have, for example, in *Le Monastère abandonné* (1816), a hero laden with a curse; in *Le Belvédér* (1818) there is another hero of the same type; in *La Fille de l'Exilé* (1818) the unity of time goes overboard (after much hesitation); in *Valentine* (1821) there is a tragic ending, due to unhappy love; in *La Tête de Mort* (1827) we have a hero pursued by remorse; in *Alice* (1829) the play ends with the gruesome discovery, by the faithless lover, of the dead body of his deserted sweetheart. The period 1816-1830, therefore, represents what one might call the "Romantic" period of Pixérécourt.

Does the element of love in these later plays of Pixérécourt bear any marked resemblance to the Romantic "passion"? Let us try to answer. Take *Le Belvédér* (1818). Note the language of the hero, Lorédan: "J'aime Emilia, je l'aime éperdument . . . la certitude de la posséder me semble préférable à tous les trésors de la terre."² Again, "un amour insensé, irrésistible, m'a conduit au bord du précipice";³ "Cette première passion, que je n'ai point

¹E. Faguet: *Propos de théâtre*, vol. II, p. 319.

²*Le Belvédér*, I, 2.

³*Le Belvédér*, I, 6.

cherché à combattre, est devenue le seul principe de mon existence, l'unique mobile de mes actions";¹ "si Emilia me repousse, je trouverai dans les flots la fin d'une vie insupportable".² What a contrast to the restrained, conventional, impassionate language of the lover of Coelina: "Ai-je le droit de vous aimer autrement que comme une parente, et dois-je prétendre au bonheur de devenir votre époux, quand je songe à l'énorme distance qu'il y a entre la fortune de mon père et la vôtre?"³

In the earlier melodramas, indeed, the element of passion is present, but chiefly in the love of "le traître". He alone is allowed to possess "une âme brûlante". Zamoski, the villain in *Les Mines de Pologne*, would have sacrificed his life (so he says) for one single day of happiness with Floreska.⁴ This, however, harmonizes with the moral intention of the melodrama, which makes passion a thing to be condemned, a thing unsocial, immoral, associated with crime. But after 1818 passion appears to be more and more condoned in the melodrama. It is no longer entirely associated with the "traître". In the play *Valentine*, the "amour insensé" of Edouard appears as at least a partial excuse for his fault. It is his friend Ernest who is the real "traître" of the piece, and Ernest acts not from passion, but from cold calculating interest. In *Le Belvédér*, too, the passionate love of the hero Lorédan is not by any means condemned, nor frowned upon, but rather defended.

It is remarkable, also, that in this play (in many respects the most "Romantic" of Pixérécourt's works) the author takes the trouble to say a word or two on behalf of "le méchant" (*i.e.* the man who is agitated by dark and violent passions): "On ne considère pas les circonstances qui ont pu l'entraîner; on ne daigne point calculer si le torrent des passions n'a pas été plus rapide pour lui que pour tout autre, si l'injustice, la vengeance, la cruauté des hommes ne l'ont pas égaré dans un âge sans force, sans énergie. . . . Ah, du moins, que l'indulgence et la douce pitié adoucissent l'amertume de son sort." It is true that the contrary opinion is immediately set forth: "Honoré les hommes vertueux, mépriser les pervers, tel doit être l'ordre immuable de la société. . . ."⁵

¹*Ibid.*, I, 6.

²*Ibid.*, I, 7.

³*Cœlina*, I, 2.

⁴*Les Mines de Pologne*, I, 2.

⁵*Le Belvédér*, II, sc. 14.

But one can almost hear, in the words of Lorédan just quoted, the tones of an Antony.

Having gone to this length, however, in the presentation and defence of passion, Pixierécourt seems to have sensed the danger. He soon saw in the Romantic drama itself what the results of the deification of passion were, what crimes were condoned in its name, and he drew out of line. He retreated to his former defences and barricaded himself behind the good old "moral" ramparts of earlier days. "Depuis dix ans," he wrote in 1842, "on a produit un très grand nombre de pièces romantiques, c'est-à-dire mauvaises, dangereuses, immorales, dépourvues d'intérêt et de vérité. Hé bien! au plus fort de ce mauvais genre, j'ai composé *Latude*, avec le même goût, les mêmes idées et les mêmes principes qui m'ont dirigé pendant plus de 30 ans. . . . Je le demande maintenant avec assurance, ce que l'on a fait depuis et même avant 1830, est-il semblable à ce que j'ai produit pendant les trente années précédentes? To which the answer seems to be not altogether the one which the worthy Pixierécourt expects.

(III) *The "Sensational" in Romantic Drama*

We have already noted¹ that in the melodrama there may be distinguished two separate species of the "sensational", viz., that which appeals directly to the senses, but has little or no effect on the plot, and that which consists of unexpected developments in the plot and which reacts on the nerves of the spectator rather than upon the senses. The first type is merely accessory and exists more or less for the purpose of *delighting* the audience, whereas the second forms an intimate part of the intrigue, and its chief purpose is to *surprise* the audience. Thus in the first class would come music, singing, dancing, tableaux, elaborate costumes and decoration, combats, striking stage effects such as storms, eruptions, floods, explosions; in the second would come the various means by which surprise is created, either in the personages of the play or in the spectators.

The Romantic drama, while not as rich in the former as is the melodrama, still has many notable examples to offer. The public, especially that of the Porte-St. Martin theatre, had been trained to look for such effects on the stage. No type of drama

¹Supra, chap. I, sec. V.

could hope to achieve or to retain the approval of the "people" unless it provided a strong appeal to eye and ear as well as to intellect and feeling. The Romantic authors knew this very well. Hugo, for example, insisted on including with his contract with the director of the Porte-St. Martin, Harel, a clause stipulating that, for *Marie Tudor*, "la mise en scène sera faite, décors et costumes, avec tout l'éclat possible."¹ Elaborate stage-setting and striking effects formed a very great part of the inheritance bequeathed by melodrama to theatrical art—an inheritance by which Romantic drama profited to a considerable extent.

With regard to musical effects, it was not to be expected that a type of drama the chief purpose of whose existence was to meet and defeat classical tragedy on its own ground should openly confess itself to be allied with the "vulgar" melodrama, by making music an essential part of itself. That would be at once to place it "outside the pale" from the point of view of critics of the higher drama. If Hugo had done for *Hernani* what he did later for *Lucrèce Borgia* (*i.e.* used prose instead of verse, and allowed the use of music as in the melodrama) the Romantic drama would at once have been recognized as a slightly higher species of melodrama. But for the earlier dramas of Hugo given at the Porte-St. Martin the seats of the musicians were occupied by the author's friends instead of by the members of the orchestra. For *Lucrèce Borgia*, however, Hugo willingly acceded to the request of Harel that the musicians be allowed to retain their seats, and that the orchestra should play at intervals throughout the piece. Alexandre Piccini, the "chef d'orchestre", who had composed music for several of the plays of Pixérécourt, was commissioned to supply the music for *Lucrèce Borgia*.²

Another feature of the melodrama of Pixérécourt that we find also in the Romantic plays (more especially those of Hugo) is the interspersion of songs throughout the piece.³ Again, tableaux are also very plentiful in Romantic drama as well as in the melodrama. In almost every play by Hugo or Dumas there appears some striking arrangement of personages or scenery, some remarkable group-

¹*Victor Hugo raconté*, chap. 59.

²*Victor Hugo raconté*, chap. 58.

³*Cromwell*, Acts III and V; *Marion de Lorme*, III, 10; *Ruy Blas*, II, 1; *Le Roi s'amuse*, III, 3 and V, 3; *Lucrèce Borgia*, III, 1; *Marie Tudor*, I, 5 and II, 1; *Angelo*, II 4; *Les Burgraves*, I, 1 and 5.

ing of costumes or stage furniture, whereby the audience has its attention directed away from the story itself towards the picture thus posed or arranged.¹

The weather also plays its part as an aid to spectacular effect in Romantic drama just as it does in Pixérécourt. In the latter's *Cælina*, for example, a storm accompanies the flight of Truguelin and the wanderings of the persecuted father and daughter. Similarly, in *Le Roi s'amuse*, it is during a violent storm that Blanche comes to meet her death at the door of Saltabadil's cabin. A storm also accompanies the orgies at the Tour de Nesle. Darkness, if not storm, broods over scenes of horror and treachery, viz., the duel of Borgia and Concini, the conspiracy in the tomb of Charlemagne (*Hernani*, Act IV).

Tumults and combats, riots and mob-violence are frequent: there is an attack on the Tower of London in *Marie Tudor*; a political revolution accompanied by street-fighting in *La Maréchale d'Ancre*, an "old-fashioned" English election scene in *Richard Darlington*; fighting occurs in nearly every Romantic play.

Costumes and stage scenery are important in both melodrama and Romantic drama. Firstly, they serve to give an air of reality and historical exactness to the play, and secondly, they add to the "picturesque" effect. But the desire for local and historical colour carried the Romantic dramatists much further in the direction of extravagance than it did their predecessors. Mere outlines no longer sufficed, it became necessary to go into details, to turn the stage into "a museum of antiquity". Pixérécourt, when giving hints as to the costumes of the opposing armies in *Charles-le-Téméraire*, says: "Les costumes sont, pour les Bourguignons, des armures complètes, en fer. Les Lorrains sont vêtus en chevaliers, avec une croix de Lorraine devant et derrière."² General characteristics are sufficient for Pixérécourt. But Hugo in *Hernani* dresses Carlos "à la mode castillane de 1519", while Doña Josefa wears a costume "cousu de jais à la mode d'Isabella la Catholique". Vigny, also, takes special care to describe the costumes of his characters, even the secondary ones, by notes attached to *Chatterton* and *La Maréchale d'Ancre*.

¹E.g. *Cromwell*, I, 11; II, 1 and IV, 7; *Marion de Lorme*, II, 1; *Hernani*, IV, 4; also *Christine* (the abdication scene), *Catherine Howard* (the execution scene), *Les Burgraves* (the arrival and self-revelation of Frederick Barbarossa).

²*Théâtre Choisi*, Vol. III, p. 222.

Melodramatic, too, is the use of physical means to produce striking effects. For example, in both *Marion de Lorme* and *Catherine Howard* the striking of a clock heralds the approach of death; cannon-shots tell of the election of Carlos in *Hernani*; the ringing of the tocsin in the same play is a sign of the king's determination to pursue Hernani; the sound of hammers used in building a scaffold is heard in *Marion de Lorme*; in *Les Burgraves* a spot of blood, shed many years before, is still visible; in *Marie Tudor* the shadow of the queen can be seen falling upon a screen which hides the queen herself; in *Lucrèce Borgia* much of the intrigue turns upon the transformation of the name *Borgia* to *orgia* by the striking out of the first letter of the name carved on the wall of the palace; in *La Maréchale d'Ancre* the spectators can see the reflection of the fire which is destroying the palace of Concini.

Melodramatic, also, from a spectacular point of view, is the appearance of the "bourreau" on the stage in *Marion de Lorme*, *Marie Tudor* and *Catherine Howard*.

The second kind of "sensational" element, *i.e.* that which has to do directly with plot, and which consists chiefly of surprises, discoveries, and unexpected developments in the intrigue, is plentifully found in Romantic drama. Indeed, of such an element the Romantic plots are chiefly composed, as we have already noted.¹ An air of secrecy pervades the drama of Hugo and Dumas; the atmosphere is tense with the possibility of striking surprises. To this end we have the inordinate use of disguise, secret passages, "portes masquées", "escaliers dérobés". Sometimes the whole plot turns on the use of disguise by one of the principal characters;² sometimes the disguise serves no apparently useful purpose except to create a "coup de théâtre".³ Surprises and "coups de théâtre" are everywhere. In some cases the audience is forewarned, in many cases it is not so. In the former there is less melodrama and more real dramatic force than in the latter, since, if the spectator knows what is coming, his nerves are sufficiently steady and his mind sufficiently calm to be able to study the effect of surprise on the personages of the play. If both the spectator and the personages themselves are surprised, we have pure melodrama, an attempt to

¹Supra, Chap. III.

²*E.g.* *Ruy Blas*.

³*E.g.* the return of the count Charles de Savoisy in *Charles VII*.

work on the nerves of the spectator instead of on his intellect or emotions.¹ Thus we are rendered capable of entering into the feelings of the surprised conspirators in the tomb of Charlemagne by the fact that we already know that Carlos has them in his power. Our attention is not drawn away from the events of the play to our own feelings by too sudden a shock to our nerves, but we are able to experience that "lifting-out" of ourselves which is always a part of true dramatic emotion. It is the same when we witness Triboulet's discovery of his daughter in the sack, or the self-revelation of Saverny in *Marion de Lorme* (Act III). But, on the other hand, in *Marie Tudor* not even the audience has a hint of the identity of the victim, until all doubts are removed by the sudden appearance of Gilbert. Hence the audience, itself kept in nerve-racking suspense, cannot properly appreciate the feelings of the queen and of Jane. Again, in *Richard Darlington*, the fact that Mawbray, the self-appointed protector of Jenny, is really Robertson Fildy, the executioner, is kept a secret from even the audience until the last words of the last scene are spoken. In *Hernani* the audience is ignorant of the real name and rank of the principal character until the revelation of them comes as a "coup de théâtre" in Act IV. In *Catherine Howard* the sudden appearance of Ethelwood, after he has been placed in the tomb and the key destroyed, is a shock to the nerves of the spectators as well as of Catherine herself. The revelation, in *Les Burgraves*, that the aged beggar is really Frederick Barbarossa is a surprise to spectators and burgraves alike.

How often, too, in Hugo and Dumas, is a secret discovered by the very person whom it was most necessary to keep in ignorance of that secret! How often does a meeting occur of two or more persons most unlikely to encounter each other! How often are well-laid plans frustrated by some unforeseen occurrence! "It is the unexpected which happens" is true of Romantic drama as of melodrama.

¹Cf. Nebout, *Op. cit.*, pp. 287-290.

CHAPTER VI

MELODRAMA AND THE STOCK CHARACTERS OF ROMANTIC DRAMA

(a) *The villain or "traître".*

The Romantic drama, like the melodrama, has its villain, and he bears a very close resemblance to the typical villain of melodrama as seen in the works of Pixérécourt. There are, however, important differences, due chiefly to the fact that the villain, as well as the hero, in Romantic drama, often exemplifies the peculiarly Romantic doctrine of revolt against society and the Romantic exaltation of passion. Thus the hero and the villain tend to resemble each other, even to merge into the same person, as in the case of Antony, Buridan, Richard Darlington. The motives of the Romantic villain are often the same as those of the "traître" of melodrama (*i.e.* jealousy, revenge, ambition), but Romantic passion colours the activities of the villain in love, as Romantic egotism (especially in the dramas of Dumas) colours the activities of the villain in politics and in society.

Many of Dumas's villains, for example, are of the ambitious type, but their ambition is only an aspect of the "Romantic revolt". Other Romantic villains are motivated by jealousy, or by the desire for revenge due to disappointed love. These represent Romantic passion at its worst.¹ In these respects, therefore, the nature of the Romantic villain harmonizes with the general character of Romantic drama.

There is also (usually at least) much more variety, more complexity, more lifelikeness, in the character of the Romantic villain than in that of a villain of Pixérécourt. The former may not be entirely wicked. Don Ruy Gomez has many good qualities, indeed he stands for ancient honour and morality, although at the last he plays the part of the villain. Simon Renard (in *Marie Tudor*) and Ethelwood (in *Catherine Howard*) are not wholly bad at heart.

¹*E.g.* Gomez (in *Hernani*), Homodéi (in *Angelo*), Ethelwood (in *Catherine Howard*), Borgia (in *La Maréchale d'Ancre*).

There are others, however, who are unredeemably wicked, and who, consequently, approach much more closely to the melodramatic type. Salluste, Homodéi, Buridan, Borgia are out-and-out villains.

As to the character of the Romantic villain, therefore, one may maintain that he differs from the villain of Pixérécourt, though that difference is not so great as might appear from the study of a few isolated cases, such as that of Don Ruy Gomez in *Hernani*. But when we come to consider the relationship of the villain to the plot, we realize that there is a close resemblance between the two types. In Romantic drama, as in melodrama, the villain holds the threads of the intrigue, he has "inside knowledge" of what is going on; he also lays his plans carefully beforehand, and takes every precaution to ensure their success. But usually, at the very end, when success is in sight, a hitch occurs, and the vengeance is thwarted or at least only partially achieved. In the cases where vengeance is achieved, the victim usually has richly deserved the fate he suffers.¹

(b) *The hero.*

The typical hero of Romantic drama is a very different person from the conventional hero of melodrama, as we see him in the works of Pixérécourt. The latter is a colourless creation, with no originality, no personality of his own; he exists, like the "traître" for the purposes of the plot alone. The former, especially in the earlier dramas of Hugo and Dumas, is a very complex character, often possessing traits that are contradictory to each other. Certain elements of his nature are abnormal, exaggerated, e.g. passion, melancholy, love of solitude. Providence is against, not for him. Fate will not permit him to profit by the use of the good qualities which he possesses. In fact, he has an importance all his own, outside his share in the plot, since he is charged with the duty of representing on the stage what the living Romanticist felt, or imagined he felt, in real life.

It is a remarkable thing, however, that one does find, in certain of the plays of Pixérécourt written before 1830, examples of characters that bear striking resemblance to the "jeune premier" of the Romantic drama. Even as far back as 1801 (*L'Homme à*

¹*Catherine Howard, La Maréchale d'Ancre, Marie Tudor.*

trois Visages) we have a hero who is a man of mystery, an outlaw (but for no crime), a brigand by disguise, though a noble in reality—a sort of “première ébauche” of *Hernani*. But there are other and better examples. The hero of *Le Belvédère* (1818), Lorédan, reminds one strongly of the gloomy, passionate, “fatal” *Hernani*. This play is founded upon the novel of Nodier entitled *Jean Sbogar*, but the character of Lorédan is for the most part Pixierécourt’s own invention.

Like *Hernani*, Lorédan is an outlaw and the son of an outlaw; like *Hernani*, he is of noble lineage, and has chosen a bandit’s life as a means of hiding his identity; like *Hernani*, he loves passionately and distractedly; like *Hernani*, he is consumed by melancholy, he has a gloomy disposition,¹ the result of perpetual brooding on his misfortunes. He is “un homme fatal”—“jamais la fatalité ne s’est plus cruellement attachée à l’une de ses victimes”.² He is not only noble of birth, but of heart as well, the protector of his people. He is “délicat, loyal, plein d’honneur”. He too has sworn an oath, and is determined to keep it in spite of all.³ He is desperate in his love affairs: “Si Emilia me repousse, je trouverai dans les flots la fin d’une vie insupportable”. But Fate, more kind to Lorédan than to *Hernani*, finally relents and allows him to enjoy in peace the love of his Emilia, while his enemies are rendered impotent and his reputation restored.⁴

Le Belvédère was played for the first time on the tenth of December, 1818, more than eleven years before the famous “première” of *Hernani*. It is hardly likely, therefore, that the character of *Hernani* can have been directly influenced by that of Lorédan, but at any rate it is clear that the gloomy, fate-pursued, bandit-hero of noble lineage was known to the Parisian theatre-going public years before the memorable night of February 25th, 1830. The influence of Byron had invaded the popular drama long before it had made itself felt in the dramas of Hugo and of Dumas.

This peculiarly “Romantic” type of hero appears in at least two other plays of Pixierécourt: *Le Monastère abandonné* (1816) and *La Tête de Mort* (1827). These plays, together with *Le Belvédère*,

¹The stage directions specifically state “ce rôle est constamment sombre.”

²Act I, sc. 8.

³Act I, sc. 6.

⁴Cf. *Hernani*, Act IV.

were among the most popular, judging from the number of representations. The first had a run of 267 nights in Paris, the second 116, the third 198. The gloomy, fate-ridden Romantic hero had therefore shown himself to Parisians nearly six hundred times before he learnt to speak in verse and call himself *Hernani* or *Didier* or *Ruy Blas*.

La Tête de Mort is a particularly "Romantic" melodrama. It concerns the remorse, conviction and punishment (by Fate alone) of one who had unwittingly caused the death of another person. The guilty man is of aristocratic birth, yet has become allied with a band of robbers. He is generous, kind-hearted, scrupulous about honour, but he has freed himself from the clutches of the law by dishonourable means, and another has received the punishment due to him as the murderer. Now he is overcome with remorse, the curse of the innocent one who suffered in his stead is on him—"les habitudes de sa vie sont devenues celles d'un insensé et d'un visionnaire"; "il a des accents de mélancolie si noires que c'est comme une frénésie".¹ He wishes to "descendre aux enfers pour y expier son crime dans une éternité de tourments".² Yet it is Fate alone which has caused all his misfortunes. He has a strange (not to say Romantic) habit of nursing his grief by gazing at the skull of his innocent substitute. He makes periodic visits to the tomb, and there addresses prayers to the spirit of the dead man. It is there that, by intervention of Providence (or Fate) he is at last destroyed—by nothing less than an eruption of Vesuvius.

La Tête de Mort is one of the few plays of Pixérécourt which end unhappily. It is also (what is most unusual in melodrama) an attempt at a psychological study—that of remorse in a sensitive mind. Practically all that is lacking to make this play a typically Romantic one (the first on the French stage in that case) is poetic style coupled with the passion of love. A couple of years later Hugo takes the very same ingredients that are found in *La Tête de Mort*, mixes in plenty of passion, flavours the mass with poetry, colours it with history—and we have *Hernani*.

(c) *The clown.*

The melodrama recognized the necessity of providing "comic relief" as a sort of reaction against the emotional strain produced

¹Act I, sc. 14.

²Act I, sc. 15.

in the audience by prolonged gazing upon scenes of horror or of pathos. Hence the rôle of the clown or "niais" was always important, and was often given to one of the "star" actors. Outside of the antics and speeches of the clown, the comic element was lacking entirely. There was no attempt to unite comic and serious elements in the same scene or in the same person.

The Romantic drama, too, claimed the right of introducing the element of comedy side by side with the tragic in the same play. But the reason given for this claim is not the simple one of providing relief from a tense situation or of creating amusement. It is a reason more profound and philosophical, viz., the drama should represent reality; reality results from the natural combination of two opposing types—the sublime and the grotesque; hence these two elements must co-exist and interweave in drama, as in life itself.¹ The Romantic drama, therefore, while accepting one of the main principles of melodrama, bases that principle, not on a practical, but on a pseudo-philosophical foundation. One result of the application of this Romantic theory is the elimination of the typical clown as a separate character. Almost any character may play the comic part—for a while at least. The same person may be at times dignified, at times clownish.² Triboulet, the court fool of Francis I, becomes the chief tragic figure in *Le Roi s'amuse*.

And yet there exist in the Romantic drama certain characters that bear a strong resemblance to the "niais" of Pixérécourt. Leaving out of consideration the "fools" in *Cromwell*, who are probably derived from those of Shakespeare, we still have Rochester and Guggligoy. The chief "raison d'être" of both seems to be merely to create mirth. The entrance of Rochester on the stage at once turns seriousness into farce. Again, in *Lucrèce Borgia*, Gubetta the spy, by his sallies of uncalled-for wit, provides mirth for the audience even in the midst of horrors. One feels that he was intended by nature for a clown, and that it is merely by profession that he is spy and murderer. Finally, in *Ruy Blas*, the rôle of Don César de Bazan is very like that of the "niais" of melodrama. While Don César is of high rank and really clever as well, whereas his prototype is usually stupid and always plebeian, yet the former exists for the same purpose as the latter, and achieves the same end in practically the same way.

¹*Cromwell*, preface, p. 32.

²E.g. Carlos in *Hernani*.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION—A SUMMING-UP OF THE ARGUMENT OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS, WITH INFERENCES DRAWN THEREFROM

In this chapter we shall attempt to summarize concisely the conclusions reached in the foregoing chapters, with the object of giving, as it were, a "bird's eye view" of the similarities and differences that we have found in our comparison of the drama of Hugo, Dumas and Vigny with the melodrama of Pixérécourt. We shall also attempt to show, as if by a sort of balance-sheet, on which side of the account the advantage lies, whether on that of difference or on that of likeness. Finally, we shall indicate what are, to us at least, the obvious inferences to be drawn from the conclusions arrived at.

With regard to characteristics that are purely "dramatic", we have seen that the melodrama of Pixérécourt and the Romantic drama are on the same level. Physical conflict for its own sake is equally characteristic of both; in both cases the plot is usually built up by the aid of purely artificial means; the intrigue is purposely made as complex and as sensational as possible; the use of nerve-racking suspense is extremely frequent, there is an undue fondness for "*des coups de théâtre*"; the emotional response which accompanies every dramatic conflict is reduced to a series of sensational thrills in which the element of surprise plays a large part; the nature of the dramatic conflict is usually of the simplest, a striking and clear-cut opposition of one will against another; there is scarcely any attempt, in either case, to arouse emotion or interest by the exposition and logical development of a conflict which is fundamentally inward.

In reference to the "tragic" element, which exists to some extent in both Romantic drama and melodrama, we have seen that the two forms of drama are alike: (1) in the failure to achieve that close identification of character with issues upon which true tragedy depends; (2) in the failure to produce a collision between opposing spiritual forces, each containing an element of right, a

collision which is fundamental in tragedy; (3) in their dependance on accidental, arbitrary and external means, instead of on the logical working-out of a tragic situation from data furnished by the given circumstances of the play itself; (4) in the substitution of the horrible for the tragic; (5) in the exaggeration of the rôle given to Fate. It is true that here and there the germ of tragedy can be found in both Pixierécourt and in the Romantic drama, but that germ is usually destroyed at an early stage in its growth. Pure tragic emotion is hardly ever attained, being weakened and diluted by mere nervous excitement, coupled with a smug feeling of "moral" satisfaction on the one hand, or an equally unjustified affectation of pessimism on the other. In spite of the unhappy ending, Romantic drama is scarcely more tragic, in the deeper sense of the word, than is the melodrama of Pixierécourt.

As to pathetic and sentimental qualities, we have seen that the Romantic passion, anti-social though it is, derives largely from the "sensibilité" which the melodrama itself inherited from the eighteenth century "drame". In both Romantic drama and melodrama pathos and sentiment exist for their own sakes, as a sort of theatrical "hors d'œuvres", not necessarily inherent in the dramatic situation, but evoked for the purpose of exciting the audience by emotional thrills manufactured, as it were, on the spot. Much use is made, in both cases, of physical aids to the expression of feeling. Pantomime, gesture, facial and bodily movements play a large part in the representation of states of feeling.

From the point of view of the sensational, also, there is close resemblance. In connection with matters of stage decoration and stage mechanics, modern realistic drama owes much to both Pixierécourt and the Romantic dramatists—to the first as the pioneer in these things, to the second as introducing them into the better-class theatres, thus making them the property of the higher as well as the lower dramatic genres. In this way, and not in this way alone, has the Romantic drama served as a link between the melodrama of Pixierécourt and the realistic drama of modern times.

Finally, as far as the similarities are concerned, some of the typical characters of melodrama receive a new lease of life in the plays of Hugo, Dumas and Vigny. The "traître" of Pixierécourt is related to that of the Romantic plays. The typical hero of Romantic drama existed on the boulevard long before Hernani's

début, witness Abélino, Lorédan, Reginald.¹ Indeed, it appears that the Romantic hero was first introduced to the play-going public of Paris, not by Hugo or Dumas, but by Pixierécourt. The "niais", too, having undergone considerable transformation, occasionally appears in the Romantic drama.

The differences that exist between the melodrama of Pixierécourt and the Romantic drama are quite palpable and easily distinguished. In the first place there is a marked reaction against the easy-going, complacent optimism which relies upon Providence to set everything right in this world. Romantic writers are at considerable pains to drive home the lesson that the world is very cruel, especially to spirits of a noble, exalted nature; that life is a battle in which victory is seldom or never on the side of the good and the just. The melodramatic philosophy of life may suit very well in an age of hope, of eager expectancy, of confiding belief in perfect justice (such as the early period of the Revolution in France), but disillusion had come over the country after the enthusiasm engendered by the Revolution and the Empire had died down. It is this disillusionment, this inability to hope, this attitude of scepticism that causes Romantic drama to take on a dress of sombre hue.

In the second place there is a strong reaction against the self-satisfied morality of the school of Pixierécourt, against the "tyranny" of social conventions, for the defence of which that school had so vigorously contended. This is one phase of the "Romantic revolt". There is both a refusal to accept the conventional standards of morality as binding on the "emancipated" individual, and a determination to shock the self-styled "respectable citizen" by a bold presentation of what he would term "gross immorality". Hence we have such plays as *Antony* and *La Tour de Nesle*.

Connected with this reaction against undue optimism and conventional morality is the Romantic assertion of the rights of the individual as against those of society. It is this that lies at the heart of every Romantic play, and it is this, indeed, that fundamentally differentiates the Romantic drama from the melodrama of Pixierécourt. The latter is strongly social, the former anti-social. The speeches made by the Romantic hero ring with accents of revolt, of independence, of emancipation from the "despotic" claims of society,² or of hatred for a world which has

¹In *La Tête de Mort*.

²E.g. *Antony*, II, 5.

treated him unfairly.¹ The actions, the words, in fact the whole life-tendencies of an Antony, a Buridan, a Darlington, reveal this attitude of revolt and self-assertion.² The Romantic passion, also, relates itself to the general "revolt of the individual". It is the assertion of the rights of the emotional nature against the restraints which had so long held it bound, the "declaration of independance" of the heart, so long held in subservience to cold reason and stiff convention. Passion, in the Romantic drama, takes the place of the melodramatic "vertu", just as Romantic Fate takes the place of Providence.

Another important difference is that the Romantic drama (at least in Hugo and Vigny) attempts to put on a philosophical garb, to consider itself a "théâtre à idées", whereas the melodrama, depending on the goodwill of the populace, dealt only in action, sentiment, morality. The characters of many Romantic plays are mere symbols, used to body forth some philosophical conception of the author's.

Finally, the style and diction of the Romantic drama lift it far above the level of melodrama. For poetic fire, for striking imagery, for energy, brilliancy, nobility, variety—in short for the employment of all the resources of language—the Romantic drama can suffer no comparison with its humble, prosaic, unliterary ancestor of the boulevard.

The chief characteristics, therefore, by virtue of which the Romantic drama may reasonably be taken to be something different from the melodrama of Pixérécourt, are characteristics that relate either to ideas or to style. These characteristics are due, first of all, to a different attitude towards life on the part of the Romantic authors, and secondly, to a different conception of the drama as literature. In all matters of form and technique, and even in matters of sentiment and emotion, the Romantic drama is but treading in the steps of its humbler predecessor. The Romantics, consciously or not, took most of their lessons on dramatic procedure and technique not from Shakespeare nor from Calderon, but from Pixérécourt. National influences, after all, and not foreign ones,

¹E.g. *Le Roi s'amuse*, II, 2.

²Signs of this revolt may be detected even in the melodrama. M. Parigot says of Pixérécourt: "Il exalte l'individu avec modestie. Il a des révoltes paisibles. Son exaltation est vertueuse, mais il est lyrique à sa façon, à la suite des modèles, qui sont tout justement ceux de Dumas."

were by far the stronger in the development of the Romantic drama in France. Having loudly and boastfully proclaimed their emancipation from classical formulas and rules, the Romantics were forced to look for new dramatic models. They found them, not in Spain, nor yet in England, but right at home in France. Generally speaking, the Romantic playwrights were not "des hommes de théâtre". With the single exception of Dumas père, they do not appear to have had "la vocation théâtrale".¹ Being, therefore, unable to create a new dramatic form to harmonize with the new principles,² they adopted, not a foreign form, but one thoroughly indigenous, one that they had known from childhood, one that had proved its popularity, that, by its freedom from restraining rules, by its generous breadth and varied complexity, seemed to harmonize already with the doctrines of Romantic art.

In addition the Romantics had proclaimed the necessity of "popularizing" the drama. The easiest way of doing this was to make use of a form that was already "popular". It is clear that, according as this idea of appealing to the "people" strengthened itself in the minds of the Romantic dramatists, their drama came more and more to resemble melodrama. But, having adopted the form and technique of melodrama, having learnt from the melodrama how to achieve thrilling emotional effects by the manipulation of clever stage devices, having taken over, also, most of the accessories of melodrama (stage decoration, costume, spectacle), the Romantics put into the melodrama thus adopted a new speech—a speech vigorous, lyrical, rejuvenated. But alas for the result! It was like the Scriptural example of "putting new wine into old bottles". After a few years the new organism failed to function and collapsed entirely.

The reason for this collapse lies chiefly in the fact that, while melodrama was intended, first, last and always for the stage, Romantic drama often forgot that it was drama. In melodrama action always had the first place, with sentiment a good second, in Romantic drama the emphasis is shifted to sentiment, passion, lyricism. The result is that Romantic drama became less and less

¹Faguet: *Propos de Théâtre*, vol. 3, p. 222.

²As we have tried to point out, De Vigny, in *Chatterton*, seems to be feeling his way towards a new form of drama in harmony with the Romantic spirit.

fitted for the stage.¹ There was great success for a time, while the Romantic fervour lasted, but when that fervour died out, then Romantic drama died also. The time came when it could be said "il n'y a plus de jeunes", that time was fatal to Romanticism on the stage.

To conclude, therefore, Romantic drama derives, as we have seen, from two incompatible sources: (1) from popular melodrama, as instituted by Pixérécourt, (2) from the Romantic exaltation of the individual, which, in spite of democratic slogans such as "la liberté dans l'art", was really an aristocratic idea. How could the offspring of such an ill-matched pair avoid being at odds with itself? The new Romantic doctrines necessitated a new dramatic form to give them proper expression. If that new form had been forthcoming we should have had a truly Romantic drama—lyrical, pathetic, tragic—such as is glimpsed in *Chatterton* and here and there in some of the plays of Hugo. But Romantic drama as it did exist, was either (as with Dumas) undisguised melodrama speaking the accents of revolt and of passion, or else (as with Hugo) lyrical melodrama masquerading under a cloak of pseudo-philosophical symbolism.

¹De Musset, as everyone knows, wrote plays for the study rather than for the stage, while Hugo himself seemed to realize in the later part of his career, the unfitness of Romantic drama for actual representation, witness his *Théâtre en Liberté*.

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